Commentary

December 2007

Crime, Drugs, Welfare—and Other Good News

Peter Wehner & Yuval Levin

My Short March Through China

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Many Seconds Into the Future—A Story

John J. Clayton

Who Owns the Vietnam War?

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Hillel Halkin

The Cult of the Difficult

Terry Teachout

Books in Review

Andrew Ferguson • Kevin Shapiro • Abraham Socher

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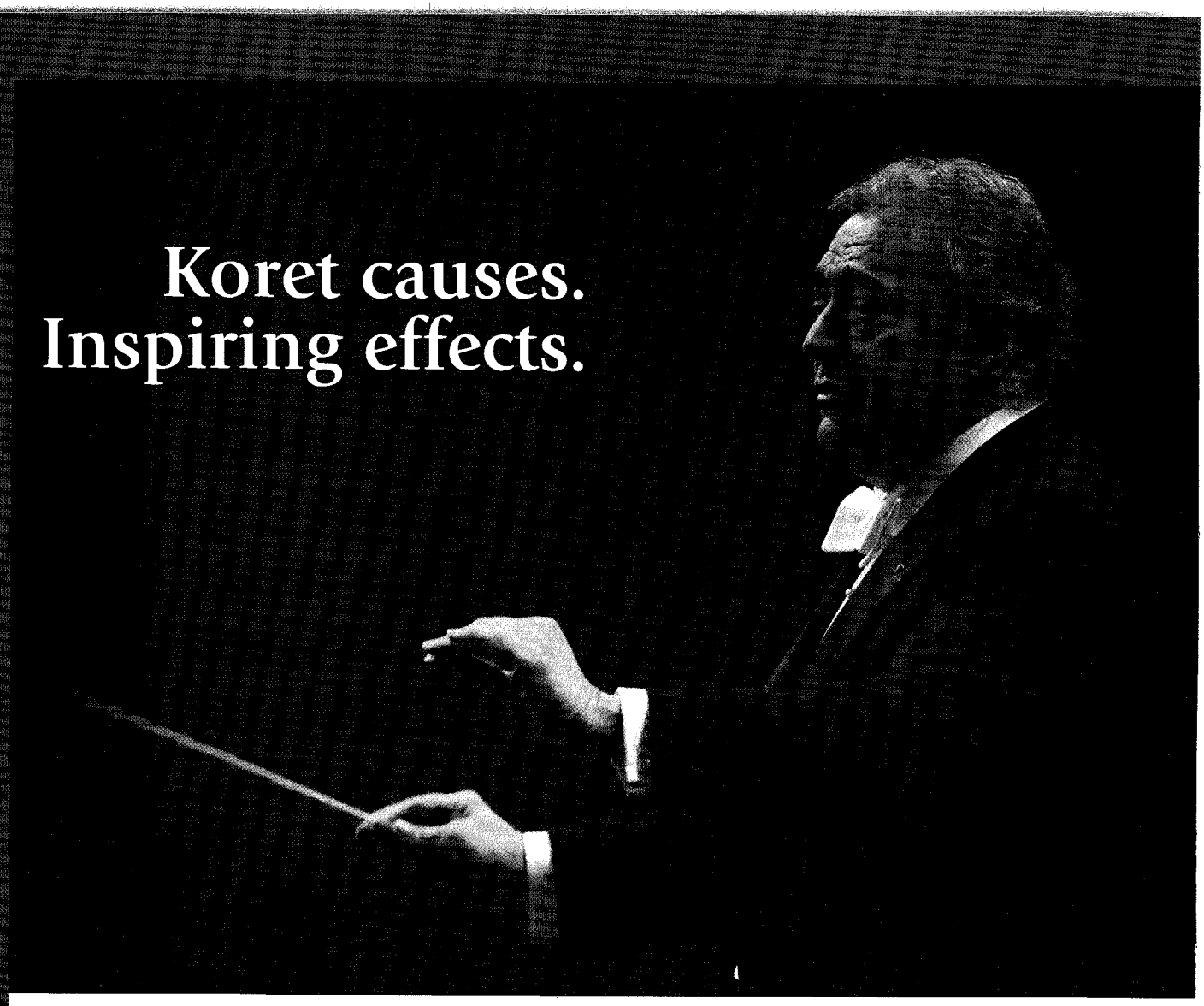

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Commentary
December 2007

Letters from Readers

Iraq

To the Editor:

Max Boot criticizes our report, "Phased Transition: A Responsible Way Forward and Out of Iraq"—which calls for a reduced force of American combat troops and an increase in troops advising the Iraqi security forces—on two counts, one general, one specific ["How Not to Get Out of Iraq," September]. First, he suggests that our plan was conceived "in response to the overwhelming impetus of public opinion to start bringing soldiers home." In fact, our proposal is explicitly aimed at serving vital American interests, in particular preventing regional war or genocide and keeping al Qaeda from establishing a safe haven in Iraq.

Mr. Boot himself notes that due to strains on U.S. ground forces, the current surge will run its course by the summer of 2008. This was confirmed in the force-reduction plans announced by General David Petraeus in early September. Since Mr. Boot agrees that a transition plan will be needed as the surge scales down, his second point—a substantive critique of our proposal—focuses on details: he argues for a more gradual, less extensive draw-down of troops.

Both a swift transition and a gradual one carry risks. If we move quickly and the Iraqi security forces are not ready to take on their added responsibilities, the security situation in the country could deteriorate as it did in 2005-06. But this risk has declined somewhat as the capabilities of the Iraqi army have improved, and particularly in areas like Anbar where our military has had success with a "bottom up" approach to building local security infrastructure.

If we move slowly, local resentment of the American occupation could grow. As the military's counterinsurgency field manual notes: "Eventually all foreign armies are seen as interlopers or occupiers; the sooner the main effort can transition to [host-nation] institutions, without unacceptable degradation, the better." That day, in our judgment, is at hand. According to a recent poll of public opinion in Iraq, 93 percent of Sunnis and 50 percent of Shiites believe that attacks on U.S. and coalition forces are acceptable; only 18 percent of Sunnis and 2 percent of Shiites felt the same way about attacks on Iraqi forces.

The transition from U.S.-led to Iraqi-led security operations will vary in its nature and timing in different parts of Iraq. Whenever and wherever the transition occurs, there is the possibility of backsliding. This risk can be reduced by beginning the transition while we have large numbers of combat forces that can fill security gaps as necessary. General Petraeus's recent testimony to Congress suggests that he sees things in this light. As for numbers, we estimated that 60,000 U.S. military personnel in Iraq by the end of the transition period might be adequate, but we acknowledged that the actual number might properly need to be higher and that the reality on the ground should be the decisive factor.

Mr. Boot argues, quite correctly, that we must pursue the "least bad option" in Iraq. There are no easy choices, nor any certain paths to success. There are some very bad choices—we share his aversion to a precipitous withdrawal—but we continue to believe that a phased transition that starts sooner rather than later is the best bet.

Shawn Brimley
James Miller
Center for a New American Security
Washington, D.C.

To the Editor:

Max Boot surveys a number of proposed alternatives

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to the ongoing "surge" strategy in Iraq, and correctly points to various risks that they involve. In the context of our own plan to lower the overall American troop presence while increasing the number of troops advising the Iraqi security forces, he worries that instability could follow. Mr. Boot favors carrying on with the surge at present troop levels since it has been working and in fact exceeding expectations.

We do not disagree in principle. But it is the case that troop withdrawals will begin in the spring of 2008 and accelerate thereafter. All the leading Democratic candidates have vowed to accelerate them further, and their view has gained traction in public opinion. The longer we go without a consensus about our Iraq strategy, the more likely it is that political forces will conspire to draw down our troops altogether. (Recall our refusal to support a beleaguered Vietnam in 1974-75.)

Given this reality, success in Iraq will increasingly depend on our ability to advise the Iraqis. At present, with the Sunnis having turned against al Qaeda, our major security challenges are persuading the Maliki government to accept Sunnis in the armed forces and encouraging the Iraqi army to deal with the death squads of Shiite militias. The strongest, least sectarian institution in Iraq is the army, as Mr. Boot has pointed out, and the army performs much better when our advisers are on patrol with them. Accordingly, the Department of Defense should plan for a systematic transition to a robust, long-term advisory force starting next spring, and guide the Army and Marine Corps to distribute promotions equally among those who serve as advisers and those in combat-arms billets.

BING WEST
Newport, Rhode Island
OWEN WEST
New York City

MAX BOOT writes:

Shawn Brimley and James Miller suggest that my critique of their proposal boils down to a quibble over details because we both agree on the imperative to draw down U.S. force levels in Iraq eventually. But so does virtually everyone else in the debate. President Bush has never argued for keeping 160,000 soldiers in Iraq indefinitely. He has always said that he will reduce our commitment as conditions permit—as the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.

In their "phased transition" report, published in June, Messrs. Brimley and Miller called for a more rapid withdrawal than the administration or our military leaders on the ground have judged prudent. They suggested an immediate end to the troop surge (which at that point had only just been fully implemented), followed by a rapid reduction down to a force of 60,000 troops by January 2009. I argued that sticking with the surge would be far more likely to produce positive results.

So far, the results have borne out my argument. Major General Richard Sherlock, director of operational planning for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reports that between the beginning of June and the end of October, car bombings in the Baghdad area went down by 65 percent and casualties of enemy action by 77 percent. The reductions in Anbar province have been even more dramatic; there was actually a week in October when not a single American service member was killed or wounded in action in what was once the most volatile region of the entire country.

If this trend continues, we can responsibly reduce force levels in the future—though I suspect that we will still need more than 60,000 troops by January 2009. But to have implemented such a massive reduction right away, as Messrs. Brimley and Miller advocated, would have been to ensure defeat. That is what I was arguing against in my article.

We should be preparing now for a time when there will be fewer American troops in Iraq and their mission will focus more on aiding the Iraqi security forces than on independent action. Bing West and Owen West are absolutely right to call for "the Army and Marine Corps to distribute promotions equally among those who serve as advisers and those in combat-arms billets." The work of advisers is vital now, and will only grow in importance. They should not be short-changed by the military's personnel system.

Conservative Judaism

TO THE EDITOR:

As Jack Wertheimer sees it, Conservative Judaism is in a muddled state, and nowhere is this more evident than in the "different and frankly contradictory rulings" recently issued by the movement's committee on Jewish law and standards concerning the fraught topic of homosexuality ["The Perplexities of Conservative Judaism," September]. But the committee's pluralistic approach, confusing as it may be to some, is not necessarily a bad thing. To quote Aristotle, "Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions." The simple fact is that Americans in general, and Conservative Jews in particular, are divided about homosexuality, and it is useless to pretend otherwise.

The fact that we have adopted two different rulings is a testament to our commitment to the truth, and to making Judaism live in the real world, rather than in some pretend world where everything is clear and settled. Rabbis and lay people will now have to do their homework in studying the decisions and deciding which to follow, but such a process can only be salutary.

Mr. Wertheimer traces Conservative Judaism's present tensions to two conflicting narratives about its origins. In both, the movement is conceived as a reaction to something else—either Reform or Orthodoxy. I would emphasize the positive side of the story, whereby Conservative Judaism was designed to be an authentic expression of the rabbinic Judaism of the past in a modern context. At any rate, being in the middle of the religious spectrum is not always easy, but the middle position is real—and as messy as life itself.

Mr. Wertheimer overstates other supposed ills of Conservative Judaism. He

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Will Money Solve Africa's Development Problems?

Yes.

But only if the money comes as investment. Africa doesn't need aid from governments and international agencies. Over the last 40 years, aid to developing countries has reached $2.6 trillion, 25% of which has gone to sub-Saharan Africa. It has notably failed to eliminate poverty. Philanthropy should have only a limited role—for disaster relief—and helping policy makers promote good governance, the rule of law, and property rights. What Africa needs in order to overcome its problems is the same as that of any other region or country: flourishing enterprises that provide employment and create wealth.

This is true even in my field—education. Less than 60% of the adult population of sub-Saharan Africa can read and write with understanding. And for every 100 men, only 76 women are literate.

Like a raging bonfire, adult illiteracy is fuelled by lack of schooling, or poor quality schooling. An estimated 40 million primary-school-age children in sub-Saharan Africa are not in school and in half of the countries less than 60% finish the full course of schooling. But staying the course isn't such a great idea either. The United Nations recently reported that, "Most poor children who attend primary school in the developing world learn shockingly little."…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Professor James Tooley is president, The Education Fund, Orient Global.

No.

Not as long as there are issues such as prolonged violent conflict, bad governance, excessive external interference, and lack of an autonomous policy space. Alone, money cannot solve Africa's development problems. Proof, if any was needed, is the fact that many of Africa's natural resource-rich countries score very low on human development indicators.

Africa's development challenges are multifaceted. Colonial history still looms large. Money cannot undo that history. Five decades after independence we are still grappling with building the nation-state. On the one hand, whole nations were split up by artificial boundaries to form separate independent countries, while on the other hand, several nation-states were lumped together within these same artificially delineated borders. To this already complex picture was added the impact of Cold War rivalries among major powers, which extended to the African theatre.

No amount of money can build the damaged trust between a government and its citizens. Decades of defective political and economic governance, and the failure by early post-independence governments to deliver on the promises of independence spun disillusionment and led to unfulfilled expectations

paving the way to undemocratic dictatorial rule, the demise of the rule of law, ethnic strife, and economic and social chaos. In extreme cases these conditions led to a string of very weak or failed states.

This said, we must realize money is still needed and Africa will, for a while, require external support by way of concessional finance, given its limited domestic savings…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Dr. Donald Kaberuka is the president of the African Development Bank and was formerly minister of finance of Rwanda.

I Thought So…

But now I don't. There is that threadbare maxim: If you hold a hammer in your hand, every problem looks like a nail. What happens, then, when all we hold in our hand is a checkbook?

Checkbook Development suggests that poor nations cannot build the skills necessary to solve their own problems. There is, however, a notable exception.

The President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, called me to his office to assist him to build private sector capacity and improve export competitiveness. I informed him that it would not be possible for the amount of money and time he budgeted to do my job and train Rwandans at the same time. He told me the story of when he had finally accumulated enough money to provide back pay for his troops who were fighting to end the genocide. He asked them if he could use the money, instead, to purchase helicopters to help end the war sooner. Not a single soldier objected.

President Kagame purchased the aircraft from countries on the condition that they also provide pilots. He then persuaded those pilots to fly missions into

enemy territory, and, at the same time, train Rwandans to fly. His tactics, in a land of no roads and a thousand mountains, shortened the war, and saved lives.

Every nation needs money to upgrade and improve the lives of their citizens; and it is good when a rich nation helps a poor one after a devastating act of God, or to meet a basic human need. But, too often, when one nation aids another it is based on a massive infusion of financial capital in return for changing monetary, trade, investment, fiscal, sectoral, and wage policies. This is often the right advice, but there is a trade-off, too. The nation with all the money often assumes the decision rights; and the responsibility for a nation's future must *always* reside with the citizens of that nation, not with foreign advisors, and certainly not with its creditors and donors…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Michael Fairbanks is the co-founder of OTF Group, and the SEVEN FUND, which provides grants for enterprise solutions to poverty.

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is surely right that the movement could be better organized, but he neglects to note that the Orthodox, for whom he has kinder words, have significant divisions of their own. He dismisses the social-justice concerns of many new congregations as "left-wing activism," but social justice has a pedigree as old as the Torah's concern for the poor and the Mishnah's counting of acts of kindness as one of the pillars on which the world stands.

Mr. Wertheimer is also incorrect when he writes that "the former West Coast affiliate of [the Jewish Theological Seminary] now claims no allegiance to Conservative Judaism at all." In fact, while the American Jewish University (formerly the University of Judaism) is open to the entire Jewish community, its rabbinical school educates only Conservative rabbis. My office of rector was created specifically to be the institution's link with the other arms of the Conservative movement.

Having registered these areas of dissent, I should say that I agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Wertheimer's recipe for the future of Conservative Judaism: we need to teach people what they "need to know, observe, and believe if they are to connect to traditional Judaism." But I would add that we also need to explain why one should lead such a life—we are a movement that values unfettered thought as well as traditional observance—and why we stand for an honest, egalitarian, traditional, and yet modern way to live authentically as Jews.

RABBI ELLIOT DORFF
American Jewish University
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Jack Wertheimer presents a lot of troubling data about Conservative Judaism. On the whole, Conservative Jews are aging and having fewer children. Significant numbers of them are intermarrying. Synagogue membership is down, and many congregations, both new and old, are choosing not to be affiliated with the movement. All of these things may be true, but I still find Mr. Wertheimer's conclusion—that the movement is adrift, lacking a clear definition of aims and a sense of common purpose among its constituents—overly bleak.

To be sure, for anyone hoping to recapture the Conservative Judaism of the 1950's, the outlook is indeed bleak. But we should not expect our movement to be static. And contrary to what Mr. Wertheimer believes, an accommodating posture—what he calls a "'big tent' approach to religious practices and expectations"—need not be incompatible with tradition. A Talmud professor of mine at the Jewish Theological Seminary once quipped that it was more difficult to interpret Jewish law to say "yes" than to say "no." We need to be flexible and contextual in our understanding of Judaism, and to see that a common purpose may coalesce around Conservative Judaism's big tent.

The fact that certain congregations choose not to be officially Conservative does not mean that they are untouched by the movement. Their leaders might be trained in Conservative institutions, their children educated in our schools and camps and with our textbooks. It would be prudent, of course, to understand why they are not joining and to work harder at getting our message to them. But we can also learn from the success of so-called "post-denominational" communities, and offer a place for their energies within the movement.

The diversity of the Conservative constituency should be viewed as a sign of strength. Our movement can be one that meets the needs of our age by respecting the choices of individuals while helping them to live lives filled with meaning. It is no shame for Conservative Judaism to emerge as a home for "traditionalist" congregations, egalitarian ones, and those devoted to "social justice."

We should also not lose sight of some of the achievements of recent years. Jewish learning has proliferated in Conservative communities to an extent that was unthinkable a few decades ago. Likewise, more men and women are observing rituals like *tefillin* than ever before. Finally, Mr. Wertheimer's suggestion that Conservative Judaism has not had traction in the international arena is belied by the movement's growth in Europe, Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and slowly but surely (in spite of the need for more funds) in Israel.

RABBI CHARLES SIMON
Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Jack Wertheimer is right: Conservative Jews need an affirmation of what they are. But his prescription, to "focus on building a cadre of Jews who can observe Jewish rituals and conduct their spiritual lives by the Jewish calendar, who can read the Torah and grasp its inmost meanings, who are at home in the Hebrew liturgy and inspired by its grandeur," is not enough.

Taking their cue from Louis Finkelstein, whom Mr. Wertheimer quotes, Conservative Jews should make it their task to uphold traditional observance and intellectual rigor. But they can only achieve this by embracing the Torah's abiding drama—the relationship between the Jewish people and God—and here is where Conservative Judaism may be at its weakest.

At my Conservative synagogue, outside of the prescribed prayers and occasional references in the rabbi's sermons, God goes unmentioned. Is this because of reticence or because of indifference? I wonder sometimes whether the idea of God has not become a kind of quaint myth in Conservative Judaism—historically important perhaps, but not anything an urbane person could take seriously.

Mr. Wertheimer, for his part, mentions God only once in his article, and that in a light aside about an "old saw." He speaks of the grandeur of the Jewish liturgy, but not of the grandeur of the God to Whom the liturgy is addressed. Can his call to action be heeded when it focuses on institutional, social, demographic, and political issues to the exclusion of religious experience?

ERIC WOLF FRIED
Albany, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to add one comment to Jack Wertheimer's excellent analysis of the state of Conservative Judaism.

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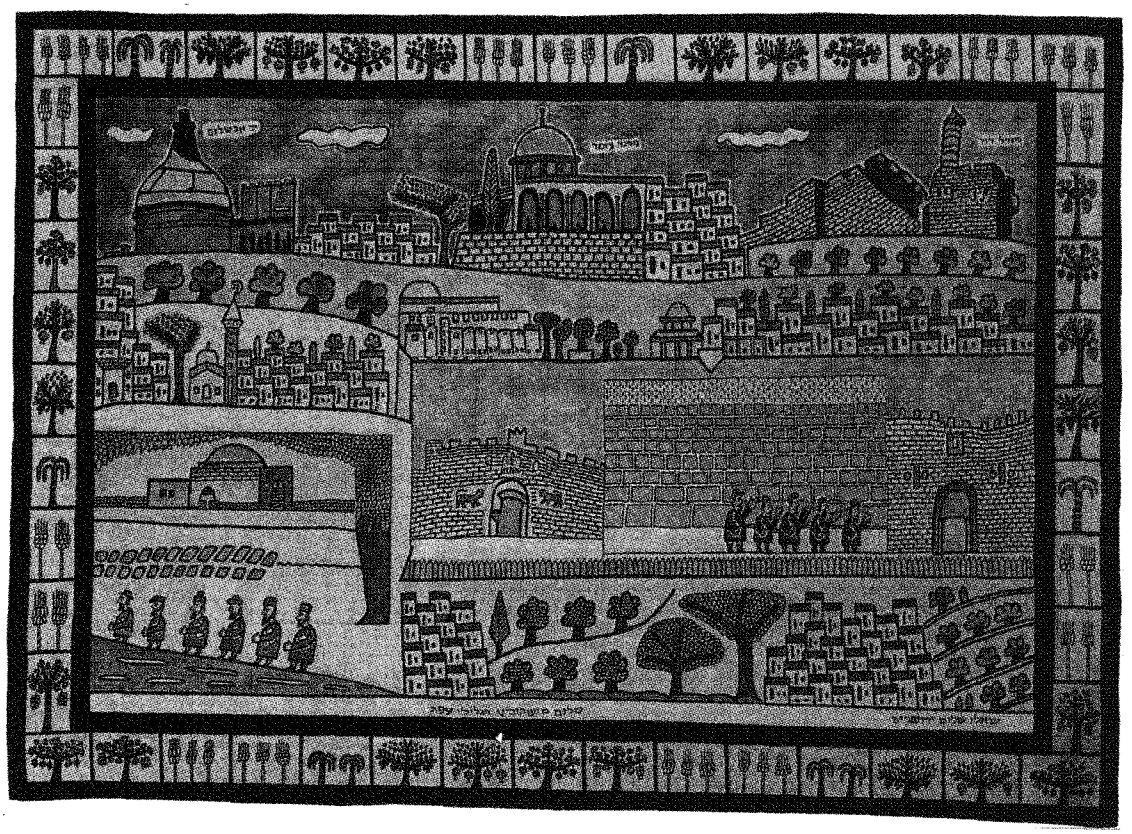
THE ART OF
SHALOM *of* SAFED



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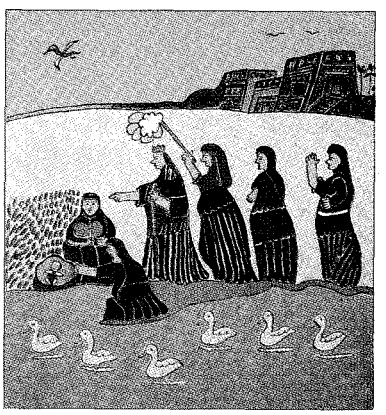

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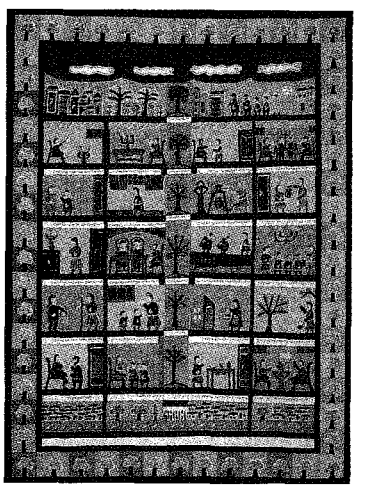

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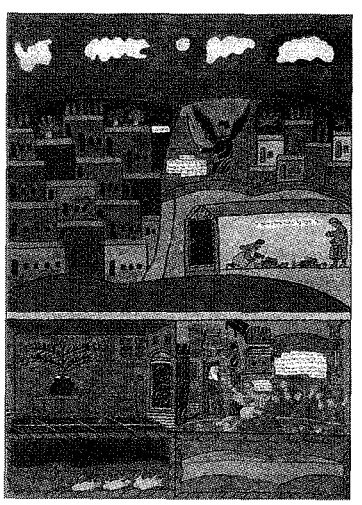

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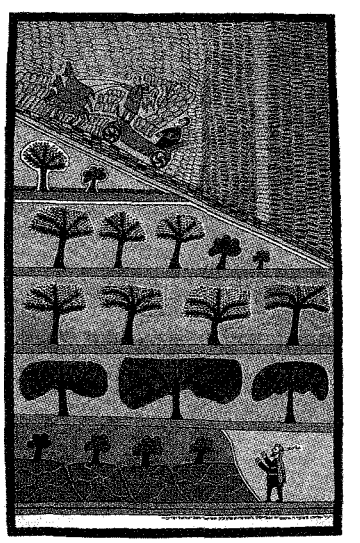

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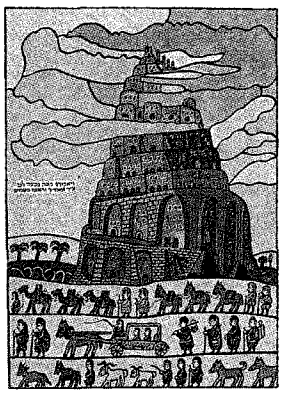

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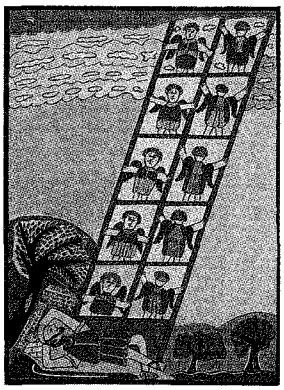

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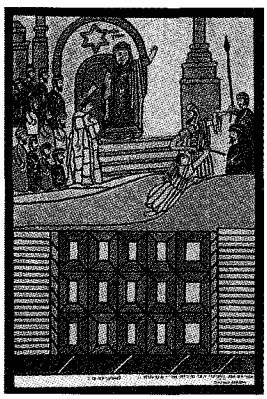

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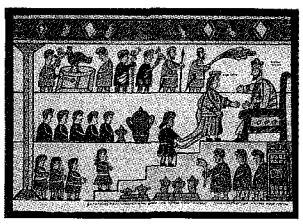

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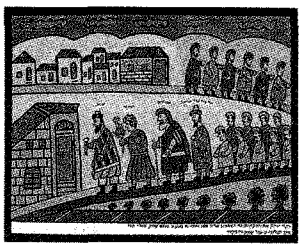

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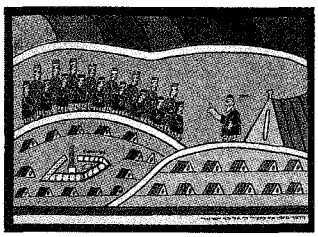

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He recalls the "traditionalist approach to Jewish law and observance" that was exemplified by former luminaries of the Jewish Theological Seminary like Louis Finkelstein and Louis Ginzberg. This was additionally bolstered by a coterie of outstanding scholars of Judaism who enjoyed the respect of the wider Jewish community. But scholars and scholarship do not appear to have the cachet they once did at JTS, and religious issues have been given over to politics. If Conservative Judaism is indeed to "return to its roots as a traditionalist movement," its flagship seminary needs to become, once again, a powerhouse of Jewish learning and authoritative leadership.

HANS FISHER
Highland Park, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Jack Wertheimer points out that as Conservative rabbis and leaders have become more "inclusive"—most recently by allowing gays to become ordained rabbis—membership in Conservative congregations has continually declined. In this context, his worries about the future of the movement are understandable, but he fails to notice that reinforcements may be on the horizon.

Among so-called modern-Orthodox Jews, the seeds of a new community are taking root, one that embraces the egalitarian ideals that were the early basis of Conservative Judaism. One finds, for example, well-educated Orthodox women taking on roles that have been traditionally limited to male rabbis, and new prayer groups in which women lead the services and read from the Torah.

Many of these practices sit uneasily with Orthodox rabbis and lay people of a more traditionalist bent. If there should be a schism over them within the movement, it is easy to see how the liberal fringe might gravitate toward Conservative Judaism.

DAVID S. MAZEL
Silver Spring, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

All honor to Jack Wertheimer for his brilliant essay illuminating the way forward for Conservative Judaism.

RABBI JOEL ROTH
Jewish Theological Seminary
New York City

JACK WERTHEIMER writes:

In my article, I identified three major areas of weakness in the Conservative movement: its numerically shrinking and aging membership; the inability of its main arms to coordinate their programs and win adequate support for the movement's larger aims; and its ever more confused, if not contradictory, messages. It is hardly surprising that Rabbis Elliot Dorff and Charles Simon would disagree with me about the path forward. What perplexes me, however, is their equanimity. How many hundreds of thousands of members must Conservative congregations lose before the urgency of the present crisis strikes home? How many Conservative synagogues and day schools must go under or disaffiliate before the movement's leadership decides to take appropriate action?

There is only sweetness and light in Rabbi Dorff's view of things. Thus, Conservative Judaism, in his mythical telling, did not de-

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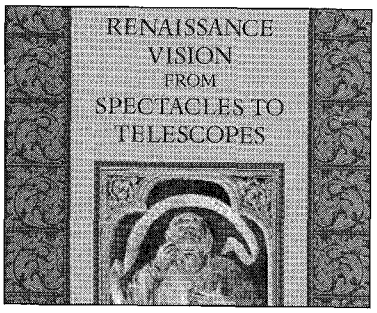

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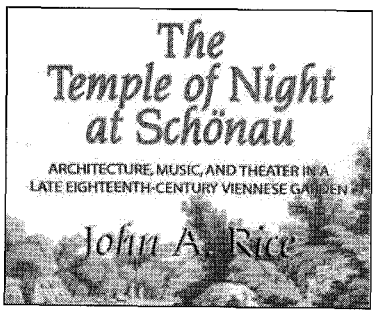

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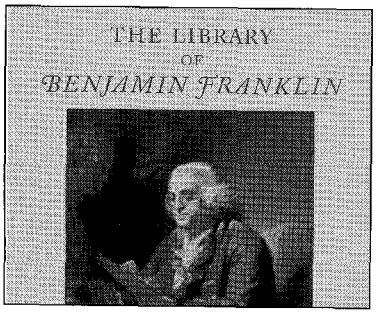

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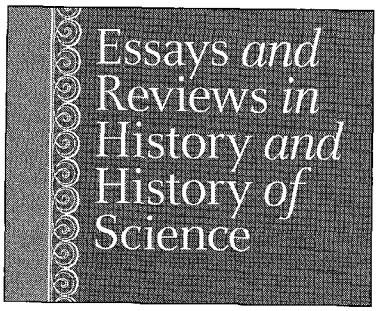

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velop in reaction to Orthodoxy or Reform or contemporary currents; at the same time, it has always been situated in the golden mean between the other movements. Today, Conservative Judaism's shrewd realism in addressing tough questions like the religious status of gays is to be celebrated. Its validation of "messiness" (I should point out that the committee on Jewish law and standards adopted not two but in fact three contradictory opinions on homosexuality) is somehow also supposed to win the hearts and minds of American Jews. In reality, the hemorrhaging of membership that we continue to witness suggests that pluralism alone is not a winning formula.

As for the relationship between the American Jewish University and the Conservative movement, I invite Rabbi Dorff to read the mission statement of the former; it includes not a word about Conservative Judaism. If the relationship between the two institutions is as firm as he claims, why would the former West Coast affiliate of the Jewish Theological Seminary distance itself from its Conservative roots?

Rabbi Simon implies that I seek to restore the crown of 1950's-era Conservative Judaism, but I explicitly stated this was not possible. And although he criticizes my "bleak" conclusions, he appears to agree with me that the movement is currently at an ideological impasse. "A common purpose," he writes, "may coalesce around Conservative Judaism's big tent." Presumably this means that there is no such common purpose at present. That a big tent per se is the vehicle that will cultivate one is something I am more skeptical about.

Eric Wolf Fried may wish to visit more Conservative synagogues; he will find that God-talk is more common in some and less common in others. At any rate, the real issue is not so much whether Conservative rabbis talk about God but how they approach the Torah and the normative life.

Hans Fisher yearns for the time when the Jewish Theological Seminary was a powerhouse of scholarship and leadership. Ironically, the great names he invokes had little to say in their time about Conservative Judaism as a movement and spent little time worrying about it. But who could disagree that scholars at the seminary today should produce good work and bring it to bear on the great Jewish concerns of our time?

David S. Mazel suggests that Conservative Judaism might benefit from a migration of modern-Orthodox Jews seeking equal opportunities for women in the religious sphere. Undoubtedly, small numbers of egalitarians have abandoned Orthodoxy for the Conservative movement, but their numbers are minuscule compared to those of defectors from the movement. I would not hold my breath waiting for a large-scale influx of disaffected Orthodox Jews. It is one of the fantasies of our time that egalitarianism is a consideration that trumps all others.

I thank my friend Rabbi Joel Roth for his gracious words of support.

Libertarianism

TO THE EDITOR:

In her discussion of my *Radicals for Capitalism: A Freewheeling History of the Modern American Libertarian Movement* and Brink Lindsey's *The Age of Abundance*, Kay S. Hymowitz has some pointed words for the libertarian philosophy of minimal government and unfettered freedom ["Freedom Fetishists," September]. She writes: "it is difficult to separate the reasons for our abiding social disarray"—by which she means primarily the breakdown of the family—"from the trends that Doherty and Lindsey praise and for which libertarians bear a measure of responsibility."

Before responding to this criticism, I would like to address a side shot Kay Hymowitz takes at the libertarian response to the civil-rights movement. Libertarians, she writes, "are remembered not for marching on Selma but for their enthusiastic support of states' rights and the freedom of white racists to associate with one another." It was the standard bastions of American conservatism, however, that were more likely to respond in this way. Libertarians, to be sure, have always supported free association for all, which would tolerate private discrimination, but they certainly recognized that Jim Crow laws were themselves a form of state interference with free association. In the words of Ayn Rand, whom Kay Hymowitz criticizes in another context: "Southern racists' claim of 'states' rights' is a contradiction in terms: there can be no such thing as the 'right' of some men to violate the rights of others."

To return to Kay Hymowitz's larger criticism: she argues, essentially, that the libertarian project is self-defeating in that the moral foundation in society necessary for its implementation is undermined by its broad tolerance for the less-than-moral. But this dilemma has not escaped the notice of such leading libertarian thinkers as Frederick Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, who stressed the importance to a healthy human society of extrapolitical values, institutions, and traditions.

Still, when it comes to the family, libertarians (and indeed most Americans) believe in legal freedoms, like easy access to divorce, that can do and have done damage to the family. But Kay Hymowitz misses what libertarians see as a more addressable threat to the health of this most vital of human institutions: state programs like Social Security, welfare, and public education. Families tend to be closer when children know that, just as their parents cared for them, they will be expected to care for their parents; when schooling is not handed over carelessly to professional educators with their own agendas; when single motherhood and "deadbeat" fatherhood are not indulged by government welfare programs.

Libertarianism is an explicitly political philosophy, not an overarching moral one, and it should not be supposed to offer a satisfactory solution to the problems of familial or social breakdown. Kay Hymowitz overstates the reach of libertarian thinking when she summarizes its creed as "[P]eople ought to be free to do whatever the hell they

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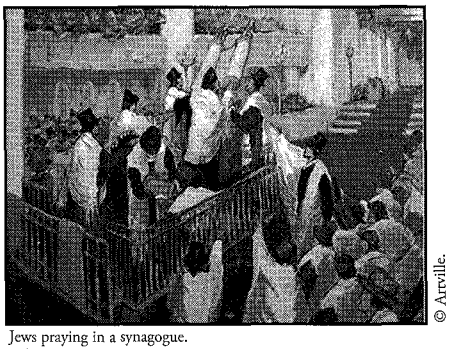
Dr. David B. Ruderman is Joseph Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History and Director of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Previously, he taught at Yale University and the University of Maryland, where he was instrumental in establishing both institutions' Judaic Studies programs. Professor Ruderman is president of the American Academy for Jewish Research, and has a lifetime achievement award from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.



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Jews praying in a synagogue.

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want, mostly, as long as they aren't hurting anyone else," and then equates it with "'if it feels good, do it,' the *cri de coeur* of the Aquarians." One can view the latter as a poor code by which to live while still believing in the political principle that people ought to be free from outside coercion as long as they are not directly and specifically hurting others.

That human beings, left to their own devices, will often make mistakes and cause grief is a fact of life, one of the Permanent Things about human nature that conservatives understand so well. Those who would herald a political solution to this fact more properly deserve the "utopian" label that Kay Hymowitz attaches to libertarians—who in recognizing the imperfection and corruption to which human beings are prone, seek to minimize the damage they can cause by keeping them from wide-ranging power over the lives and property of others.

BRIAN DOHERTY
Reason
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Kay S. Hymowitz is correct to point out that the libertarian aim of maximizing freedom is often ill-served by the movement's sociopolitical prescriptions. Taken to their logical conclusion, libertarian policies can only damage and ultimately destroy the institutions of family, religion, and patriotism that make freedom possible. To reach an optimum overall level of freedom, society must be seen as a whole; here and there constraints must be applied and compromises made.

Libertarians do play a useful role in keeping the culture from straying too far in the communal direction. But as a leading philosophy, pure libertarianism is a one-way ticket to chaos—the kind of void into which the Leviathan state has historically entered.

PETER SKURKISS
Stow, Ohio

KAY S. HYMOWITZ writes:

Brian Doherty writes that "libertarianism is an explicitly political philosophy, not an overarching moral one," thereby suggesting that questions concerning the family should be set aside in a box labeled "moral issues." This is a telling point of confusion on his part. Political philosophers from Plato to Rousseau to Marx, and especially the proto-libertarian Locke, have been deeply interested in the family, not for explicitly moral reasons but because they understood that how we rear our children—the next generation of citizens—has serious political implications. Frederick Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, whom Mr. Doherty describes as libertarians concerned with "extrapolitical values, institutions, and traditions," saw that the family was essential to the workings of a free society, and that collectivist politics undermined the family.

But because contemporary libertarians measure all political questions by the narrow index of personal freedom, there is little room in their philosophy to ponder broader social questions of the sort that interested Hayek and von Mises. I agree with Mr. Doherty that government programs—welfare being the most obvious example—often corrode family ties, and that free people often make poor decisions. But do these factors adequately explain a 37-percent out-of-wedlock birthrate? Are they alone the reason why at some point around 1968, millions of Americans decided that fathers were extraneous? If libertarians wash their hands of this as an "extrapolitical" moral issue, if they can only point an accusatory finger at Social Security and public education (first suggested, incidentally, by that other proto-libertarian, Thomas Jefferson), then their philosophy, as I argued in my piece, is wanting.

My remarks about libertarianism and the civil-rights movement were in response to Brink Lindsey's claim, in *The Age of Abundance*, that the advances of the 1960's represented a libertarian victory. Mr. Doherty's (correct) assertion that some conservatives were slow to support civil rights does not answer my objection that Lindsey's assertion is, at best, exaggerated, notwithstanding what Ayn Rand had to say about Southern racists.

I thank Peter Skurkiss for his striking point.

New Orleans

TO THE EDITOR:

In "New Orleans—An Autopsy" [September], Ben C. Toledano proves himself an excellent diagnostician of civic disease. There can be no doubt that a combination of corruption, a stultifying class system (among whites and blacks alike), and the lack of a merit-based economy were ravaging New Orleans long before Hurricane Katrina hit. Mr. Toledano is also right to skewer the elites that allowed the illness to fester. But I believe that his "autopsy" is premature; New Orleans is not dead, and it can be rebuilt.

Mr. Toledano writes of the "lost joys" of the city's "cuisine, music, and architecture," and suggests that for a long time they merely "masked problems of major proportions." Maybe so. But the joys have not been altogether lost: much of the city's cultural nucleus escaped major flooding during Katrina, and its "undeniable charms and graces" have not lost their power to attract.

This is not to suggest a New-Orleans-as-theme-park revitalization program. A vibrant culture, however, can attract not only dreamers but also workers, planners, and entrepreneurs who want to build a good life while enjoying good times. Economically, too, the need for a major port at New Orleans's precise geographical coordinates is unchanged.

One reason for Mr. Toledano's skepticism about New Orleans's future is that its most capable native sons—those who might form an elite that would challenge the cycle of poor governance—tend to depart for places more hospitable to their talents and ambitions. But renewal does not necessarily have to come from within. Almost every time I check with friends and family back home (I myself left New Orleans sixteen years ago to pursue a career in journalism), they tell me that despite persistent problems of crime and corruption, they are encouraged by an ongoing influx to the city of young, energetic newcomers.

Clearly, there remains much doubt about which

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force will win the new battle for New Orleans. The voters, for their part, did not help themselves by reelecting the incompetent Ray Nagin as mayor in 2006. But cities—indeed, entire nations—have recovered from worse problems than those bravely outlined by Mr. Toledano, and New Orleans still has ample reason for hope.

QUIN HILLYER
The American Spectator
Alexandria, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

Ben C. Toledano's comments on the problems of New Orleans included some amusing details and were interesting to read. I am familiar with many elements of the picture he paints. My father was the original Jewish partner in one of the law firms Mr. Toledano refers to, paired with a vintage Episcopalian aristocrat who later became a renowned federal judge. And just like the cast of five characters named by Mr. Toledano, all of whom I know well or at least casually, I too moved to New York to pursue my interests. Although I never hit a glass ceiling in New Orleans (or anywhere else), Mr. Toledano's essay did set me wondering whether my indifference to the exclusion of Jews and others from my native city's antiquated birth-based clubs might suggest that I had unconsciously bought in to the upper-class New Orleans ethos that is his theme.

Still, to attribute the current catastrophe in New Orleans in any significant way to the Boston Club and its cousins makes no sense, and the anecdotes marshaled by Mr. Toledano hardly prove his case. If, in New Orleans law firms, the Jewish name came second more often than first, as he points out, many elite firms in places like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston had no Jewish partners at all in those days. And who, Jewish or otherwise, with the talents and ambitions of a Nicholas Lemann or Walter Isaacson would have stayed in New Orleans (or Atlanta, Houston, or anywhere else) when New York, Washington, and the like beckoned?

Besides, whatever the power structure in New Orleans 50 years ago, the serious wealth and power passed in time into the hands of white Christians of non-aristocratic birth, Jews, and latterly African-Americans. Mr. Toledano correctly identifies the serious problem, even after Katrina, of the black elite's monopoly on high elective office in Orleans Parish, and the frequency of corruption among elected officials from that community. But the suggestion that powerful blacks absorbed their value system osmotically from the exclusive white clubs is not only unsubstantiated but very counterintuitive. I fear, alas, that they created their own system.

Ironically, when it comes to the saliency of birth and caste in New Orleans, Mr. Toledano misses one striking historical example: the high sensitivity among New Orleans Jews themselves to the distinction between those who arrived from Germany and Alsace in the 19th century (the presumptive elite) and those who came from Eastern Europe in the 20th. In my youth some blurring had already set in, but many Jewish families still chose schools, swimming pools, and synagogue affiliation based on this sub-ethnic classification. In the generation before mine, it must have been a formidable barrier: my father, of decidedly Eastern European origin, said that when he attended Tulane in the 1920's he was more welcome as a guest in the most exclusive non-Jewish fraternity houses than in the one of the Western European Jews. A similar differentiation existed historically in many Jewish communities, but it always seemed especially persistent in New Orleans—and in this, the Gentile club structure and Mardi Gras hierarchy may indeed have played a role.

Finally, I reiterate that talented young people will continue to leave this special and still highly seductive city for a variety of reasons having little or nothing to do with the inaccessibility of the Boston Club. This was certainly true in my own case. Far from perceiving a potential limit on my success by staying home, I in fact thought I might do better in that medium-sized pond. If I moved elsewhere, it was mostly because I had developed a serious attachment to traditional Judaism and talmudic learning. New York provided for this interest; New Orleans did not. In suggesting that our kind decamped because we could not be Mardi Gras *machers*, Mr. Toledano's essay overlooks the possibility of more complex, and more persuasive, motives.

RICHARD B. STONE
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Ben C. Toledano suggests that exclusion from certain lunch clubs and private Mardi Gras organizations impeded New Orleans Jews in their professional advancement and slowly drove many of them from the city. As anecdotal evidence, he cites three individuals now in their seventies, two in the business and financial world and one a renowned doctor, and, in a later generation, two prominent journalists, Walter Isaacson and Nicholas Lemann. All five ended up in New York. He then notes that in 1970, New Orleans "had 10,000 Jewish residents; today there are probably fewer than half that number."

As of mid-August 2005, however, the Jewish population of New Orleans still stood at 10,000. Since then, it has dropped not by over half but by a third (according to the local Jewish Federation). That drop resulted not from social dissatisfaction but from Hurricane Katrina, and it is directly proportional to the post-Katrina decline in the city's population as a whole.

The vast majority of Jews in New Orleans did not care, and had no cause to care, about the admissions policy at some private club. In fact, they were so successful in so many fields, and became so prominent in philanthropy, that it is hard to believe they constituted only one to two percent of the population. As long ago as the early 1900's, Jewish lawyers began founding or joining firms with Gentiles who were core members of exclusive clubs; many such firms still exist today as "old-line" practices.

Talented people from all

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over the country, including Jews, have often gravitated to New York, especially to pursue careers in business, finance, writing, and journalism. But to escape exclusivity? In New York, Jews were barred from white-shoe firms until the late 1950's. In addition, New York exceeded New Orleans in exclusive clubs and developed a more important form of exclusion that did not exist in New Orleans: restricted apartment buildings.

As for Mr. Toledano's five individuals, why did he not also cite Michael Lewis, another nationally prominent writer originally from New Orleans? Could the reason be that Lewis is himself, by birth and social class, a member of the "controlling oligarchy"?

HARVEY M. STONE
New York City

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

We are delighted to announce that John Podhoretz has been named to succeed Neal Kozodoy in the position of COMMENTARY's Editor as of January 1, 2009.

Mr. Podhoretz joined the COMMENTARY staff in November. In the interim role of Editorial Director, he is assuming particular responsibility for the development and expansion of our online editorial activities. Upon his accession to the editorship in January 2009, he will become the fourth Editor in COMMENTARY's six-decade history.

Mr. Podhoretz has held executive positions at several publications, including the *Weekly Standard*, which he co-founded, *Insight*, and the *New York Post*. The author of three books about presidential politics, he served for ten years as the lead political columnist of the *New York Post*, has been the regular film critic of the *Weekly Standard* since its inception, and until recently was a daily contributor to "The Corner," *National Review*'s group blog. He is now blogging regularly on *contentions* at www.commentarymagazine.com.

Mr. Podhoretz, forty-six, lives in New York with his wife and two daughters. He is the son of Norman and Midge Podhoretz.

Following the January 2009 transition in COMMENTARY's editorship, Neal Kozodoy, who has been with the magazine since 1966 and has served as its Editor since 1995, and as President of COMMENTARY, Inc. since the beginning of this year, will continue his active association in a consulting role.

We welcome John Podhoretz warmly to the COMMENTARY team.

Neal Kozodoy, Editor
COMMENTARY

Michael W. Schwartz, Chairman
Commentary, Inc.

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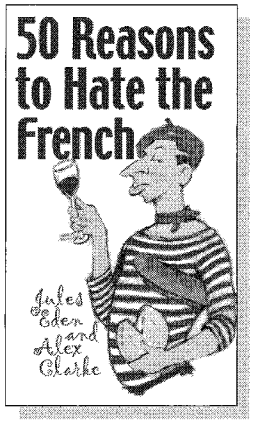
Holiday panache.



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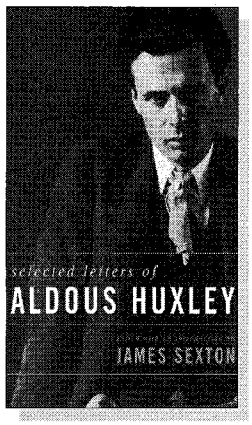

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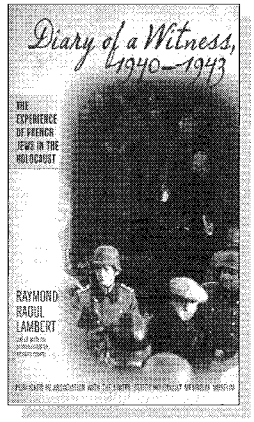

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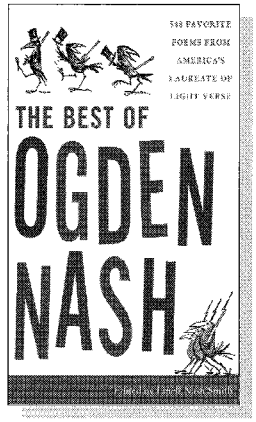

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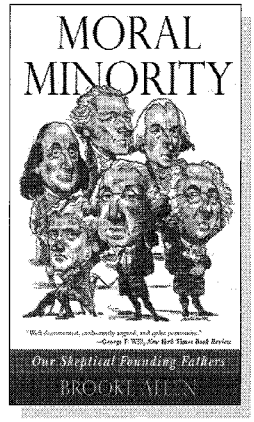

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Commentary
December 2007

Crime, Drugs, Welfare—and Other Good News

Peter Wehner & Yuval Levin

Fifteen years ago, a deep pessimism seemed to be stalking the American landscape. It arose from diverse quarters, took different forms, and cited a congeries of different symptoms—military, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual—in support of its dark diagnosis. For some, like the Yale historian Paul Kennedy, America's commitments abroad—dubbed by Kennedy a species of "imperial overstretch"—were a sure harbinger of impending national decline. Others, like the leftist literary critic Alfred Kazin, saw a broad collapse of domestic morale, partially disguised by our "unparalleled technological power and scientific advance." Echoing Kazin from the other side of the political spectrum, James W. Michaels, the editor of *Forbes*, introduced a symposium marking his magazine's 75th anniversary by declaring the American condition to be a moral and cultural "mess":

> While the media natter about a need for economic change, these serious intellectuals [in the *Forbes* symposium] worry about our psyches. Can the human race stand prosperity? Is the American experiment in freedom and equal opportunity morally bankrupt? . . . It isn't the economic system that needs fixing. . . . It's our value system.

As for the social reality underlying this general feeling of decline, a number of conservative commentators, concentrating especially on the areas of crime, welfare dependency, and illegitimacy, undertook the task of quantifying and analyzing the available evidence. The most notable such effort was by William J. Bennett, who in March 1993 released a report entitled *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators.**

Over the course of the preceding three decades, Bennett wrote, the United States had indeed experienced "substantial social regression." About this, the data were unequivocal. Since 1960, there had been a more than 500-percent increase in violent crime; a more than 400-percent increase in out-of-wedlock births; almost a tripling in the percentage of children on welfare; a tripling of the teenage suicide rate; a doubling of the divorce rate; and a decline of more than 70 points in SAT scores. To Bennett, the conclusion was inescapable: "the forces of social decomposition [in America] are challenging—and in some instances overtaking—the forces of social composition."

Could anything be done to halt the slide, or even turn it around? Few seemed to hold out much hope. "America's worsening social pathologies," ac-

Peter Wehner, *until recently the director of the White House office of strategic initiatives, is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.* Yuval Levin *is a fellow at the Center and senior editor of the* New Atlantis. *Both contribute regularly to* Commentary*'s online blog,* contentions.

* Peter Wehner worked for Bennett at the time and helped produce the report.

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cording to the Heritage Foundation's journal *Policy Review* in 1994, "have convinced many on both sides of the political aisle" that no end was in sight to the nation's "deep cultural decline." Robert H. Bork's 1996 book *Slouching Toward Gomorrah* put this view most starkly. In his chapter on crime and welfare, Bork wrote:

> These pathologies were easy to fall into and will be very difficult to climb out of. There is, in fact, no agreement about how to cure them. It may be, in fact, that a democratic nation will be unable to take the measures necessary, once we know what those measures are.

Summing up, Bork urged his readers to "take seriously the possibility that perhaps nothing will be done to reverse the direction of our culture, that the degeneracy we see about us will only become worse."

But a strange thing happened on the way to Gomorrah. Just when it seemed as if the storm clouds were about to burst, they began to part. As if at once, things began to turn around. And now, a decade-and-a-half after these well-founded and unrelievedly dire warnings, improvements are visible in the vast majority of social indicators; in some areas, like crime and welfare, the progress has the dimensions of a sea-change. That this has happened should be a source of great encouragement; why it happened, and what we can learn from it, is a subject of no less importance.

IN A NUMBER of key categories, the amount of ground gained or regained since the early 1990's is truly stunning. Crime, especially, has plummeted. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), the rates of both violent crime and property crime fell significantly between 1993 and 2005, reaching their lowest levels since 1973 (the first year for which such data are available). More recent figures from the FBI, which measures crime differently from the NCVS, show an unfortunate uptick in violent crime in the last two years—particularly in cities like Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. Even so, however, the overall rate remains far below that of the mid-1990's.

Teenage drug use, which moved relentlessly upward throughout the 1990's, declined thereafter by an impressive 23 percent, and for a number of specific drugs it has fallen still lower. Thus, the use of ecstasy and LSD has dropped by over 50 percent, of methamphetamine by almost as much, and of steroids by over 20 percent.

Then there is welfare. Since the high-water mark of 1994, the national welfare caseload has declined by over 60 percent. Virtually every state in the union has reduced its caseload by at least a third, and some have achieved reductions of over 90 percent. Not only have the numbers of people on welfare plunged, but, in the wake of the 1996 welfare-reform bill, overall poverty, child poverty, black child poverty, and child hunger have all decreased, while employment figures for single mothers have risen.

Abortion, too, is down. After reaching a high of over 1.6 million in 1990, the number of abortions performed annually in the U.S. has dropped to fewer than 1.3 million, a level not seen since the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe* v. *Wade*, which legalized the practice. The divorce rate, meanwhile, is now at its lowest level since 1970.

Educational scores are up. Earlier this year, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that the nation's fourth- and eighth-graders continue to improve steadily in math, and that fourth-grade reading achievement is similarly on the rise. Other findings show both fourth- and twelfth-graders scoring significantly higher in the field of U.S. history. Black and Hispanic students are also making broad gains, though significant gaps with whites persist. The high-school dropout rate, under 10 percent, is at a 30-year low, and the mean SAT score was 8 points higher in 2005 than in 1993, the year Bennett published his *Index*.

More generally, we are seeing important progress in critical areas of youth behavior. Since 1991 (a peak year), the birth rate for teenagers aged fifteen to nineteen has decreased by 35 percent. The number of high-school students who have reported ever having sexual intercourse has declined by more than 10 percent. Teen use of alcohol has also fallen sharply since 1996—anywhere from 10 to 35 percent, depending on the grade in school—and binge drinking has dropped to the lowest levels ever recorded. The same is true of teens reporting that they smoke cigarettes daily.

John P. Walters, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, has summarized these across-the-board findings in one succinct sentence: "We have a broad set of behaviors by young people that are going in a healthy direction."

TO BE SURE, we have not reached anything like nirvana. The gains made are not yet secure, and could easily be lost. Nor should it be forgotten that the improvements occurred after more than

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three decades of an almost uninterrupted freefall. Finally, the pathologies that still afflict us are serious, and evidently continue to be immune to the otherwise improving trend.

Thus, our popular culture remains, in many respects, a cesspool of violence and vulgarity. The "soft nihilism" and cultural relativism about which Allan Bloom wrote so powerfully in the late 1980's are still with us, and at the same time many of our leading universities remain beholden to a radical leftist ideology. The yoking-together of these two syndromes may be even more widespread today than yesterday.

Perhaps most importantly, some of the most vital social indicators of all—those regarding the condition and strength of the American family—have so far refused to turn upward. Even as the teenage birth rate has fallen, out-of-wedlock births in general have reached an all-time high: 37 percent of all births in 2005. Over half of all marriages are now preceded by a period of unmarried cohabitation, and marriage rates themselves have declined by almost one-half since 1970.

In the life of any society, the place of the family is central. That fact alone makes these last statistics significant, and seriously complicates the picture of dramatic progress in other, related realms. Indeed, the two starkly divergent trends, taken side by side, should cause us to reconsider certain common assumptions concerning just how culture, behavior, family, and society interact, and how they change.

THE MOST striking element of the overall picture continues to be the extraordinary turnaround in nearly every area apart from the family. The progress we have witnessed over the last 15 years is impressive, undeniable, and beyond what most people thought possible. There was, it is fair to say, essentially no one in the early 1990's who predicted it. How, then, did it happen?

Obviously, no single explanation will suffice. Instead, long-overdue changes in government policy appear to have combined with a more or less simultaneous shift in public attitudes, with each sustaining and feeding the other. We may begin with the change in policy, for if the last fifteen years demonstrate anything, it is the enduring power of policy, properly understood, to influence culture.

The 1996 welfare-reform bill was the most dramatic and successful social innovation in decades, reversing 60 years of federal policy that had long since grown not just useless but positively counterproductive. In effect, the new law ended the legal entitlement to federally funded welfare benefits, imposing a five-year time limit on the receipt of such benefits and requiring a large percentage of current recipients to seek and obtain work.

When the bill was passed, there were dire predictions, mostly emanating from liberals, of an explosion of poverty and hunger. They were just as quickly refuted. State welfare rolls plummeted—and poverty, instead of rising, decreased. Welfare reform sent a message in bright neon lights: higher expectations will yield better results. Rather than giving up on the poor, the new policy assumed that the able-bodied were capable of working, expected them to work, and was rooted in a confident belief that, materially and otherwise, they would be better off for it. In each of these particulars, the policy makers proved correct. If, as the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb wrote in the 1990's, our old social policy had "succeeded in 'demoralizing' . . . society itself," the new policy proved to be profoundly re-moralizing.

Crime rates, too, benefited from something of a policy revolution over the course of the 90's. Applying methods and concepts developed by James Q. Wilson, George L. Kelling, and others, innovators like then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in New York City and his police chief William Bratton pursued a zero-tolerance approach to crime that quickly became a model for other cities and states. Incarceration rates rose, policing improved, crime data were processed faster, criminal patterns were identified more effectively—all of which furthered the twin goals of intervention and prevention. Similar gains were posted by programs like Philadelphia's Youth Violence Reduction Partnership, in which an array of urban agencies, working together, drove down homicide rates in the most violent parts of the city by focusing on youths most at risk of killing or being killed.

The progress we have made against drug use appears in large part to be another product of a reformed government policy. By the late 1980's, in the heyday of the crack epidemic, drugs had come to be regarded as our most serious domestic challenge, and formed the subject of President George H.W. Bush's first prime-time address to the nation. Discarding the piecemeal approach of the past, which concentrated now on one, now on another point of the drug-use continuum, Bush forged an integrated approach, applying pressure on all fronts: law enforcement, prevention, treatment, interdiction, and education. A critical element in the campaign was a public-awareness effort centered on the explicitly moral argument that drug use degrades human character.

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The consequences were swift in arriving. If, in the 1970's, drug use had been widely seen as liberating and glamorous, by the late 1980's it was coming to be perceived as both dangerous and dumb. During the Clinton presidency, the drug issue was allowed to fade from attention, but since then national policy has returned to its former levels of efficacy, and the statistics reflect the encouraging results.

In education, the emphasis placed by government at every level on testing, accountability, and transparency has unquestionably made a difference. Every state now applies statewide academic standards, which, though in many cases still not high enough, at least measure performance against identifiable benchmarks. While the details of the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind program have been controversial, its general approach has come to be broadly accepted—and has produced results. In the meantime, the rise in charter schools and publicly funded school-choice programs, along with the advent of "virtual" education, has created many more options for American families.

AS FOR THE decrease in abortions, it seems to have been influenced less by policy than by the changing terms of public debate and, more importantly, by increasingly responsible attitudes among the young. Two decades ago, pro-life spokesmen changed their rhetorical tactics and began to choose their fights more carefully. The clear-cut issue of partial-birth abortion, although not settled legislatively until 2003, colored the abortion debate throughout much of the 1990's, in the process creating greater sympathy for a moderately pro-life position. And the pro-abortion Left likewise softened its rhetoric, evidently reasoning that a more cautious approach, as encapsulated in Bill Clinton's promise to make abortion "safe, legal, and rare," was likelier to draw support. As a result, some of the more extreme arguments for unrestricted abortion rights slowly dropped by the wayside.

Other factors played a role as well, including the efforts of pro-life groups to assist women with unwanted pregnancies, the greater availability of birth control, and advances in our scientific understanding of fetal development. Contributing to the rethinking was the more widespread use of sonogram technology, which enables would-be parents to see the developing child and its human form at a very early stage. All in all, not only has the public discussion of abortion been profoundly transformed, but younger Americans seem to have moved the farthest—in September, a Harris poll found that Americans aged eighteen to thirty were the *most* likely of all age groups to oppose the practice. This trend seems likely to continue.

With the abortion issue, we have already moved from a change brought about in large part by government policy to one arising mainly through the (sometimes heated) give-and-take of public discussion and the slow, subterranean shifting of social attitudes. The same may be said of the drop in the divorce rate, which has been going on for a couple of decades now. This appears almost entirely attributable to the changed attitudes of well-educated Americans, whose views on the matter have grown decidedly less permissive.

How so? According to Brad Wilcox of the University of Virginia, college-educated Americans have absorbed the message—from the media, religious institutions, civic organizations, and their own experience—that children do best when born to and raised by married parents. As a corollary, these educated Americans seem more and more willing to make the sacrifices necessary to stay married, for the sake of both their own welfare and that of their children.

Wilcox adduces two additional facts to round out the picture of a declining divorce rate. First, we now see very few teen marriages—a good thing not only for teenagers unprepared for the burdens of married life but for the institution of marriage altogether, since partners in their twenties or thirties are more likely to place a premium on stability. Second, marriage is much more selective. Because those marrying tend to have more income, more social skills, more of a stake in marriage, and more pro-marriage attitudes, they are less likely to divorce.

This is all to the good—as far as it goes. The downside is that it seems only to apply to those with higher levels of education. Among less educated Americans, divorce rates have not fallen at all. And here we confront once more the cluster of family-related issues where, as we have seen, the indicators remain stubbornly and perplexingly worrisome.

HOW TO account for the anomalous absence of improvement or, more precisely, the acceleration of decline in the overall marriage rate, in rates of cohabitation without marriage, and in illegitimacy? And suppose that, in 1992, you had known that the picture in these crucial areas of family life would continue to be at least as dark in 2007, if not darker. Would you not also have predicted a similarly dismal profile in the related areas

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of crime, drug use, welfare, education, teen sexual activity, teen suicides, abortion, and poverty?

In fact, just that kind of linkage was behind many of the most dire forecasts of the 1990's. In 1993, reviewing national figures on illegitimacy, then at just under 30 percent of all births (by 2005, as we have noted, they would reach 37 percent), the social scientist Charles Murray wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* that "every once in a while the sky really is falling."

Murray is no inveterate pessimist. It was his creative approach to dependency, as set out in his 1984 book *Losing Ground*, that laid the intellectual groundwork for the dramatic successes in welfare policy; he is in many ways the father of the 1996 reform bill. Yet, along with many others, Murray believed that rising illegitimacy would lift with it a whole fleet of social pathologies. "Illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time," he wrote, "more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare, or homelessness *because it drives everything else*" (emphasis added).

Murray may well have been correct about the importance of illegitimacy. But he—and not he alone—seems to have been incorrect that it would drive everything else. Over the past fifteen years, on balance, the American family has indeed grown weaker—but almost every other social indicator has improved.

Murray's dictum could still be borne out in the long run; in time, the explosion of illegitimacy might undo the signs of healthy cultural revival we have charted. Or it may be that the broad improvement in cultural attitudes will in time cast its benefits upon the family as well, helping to curb the seemingly inexorable growth of illegitimacy. Or neither of these may happen, and it may instead turn out that we have underestimated the degree to which improving social factors in other areas can compensate for the enduring damage caused to individuals in broken or never-formed families.

The point is that we do not know everything, and we cannot come to unequivocal conclusions about the future on the basis of the last fifteen years. No trend line runs consistently for long, and no rule is without exceptions. That does not mean, however, that we have learned nothing, or that no lasting lessons can be drawn from our experience.

FOR ONE thing, we clearly benefited in the last fifteen years from the fact that, for many years previous, a number of very acute observers were insisting on an honest assessment of where we were and how bad a place it was. This was the necessary first step toward any possible recovery. In time, and with strong leadership, the nation heeded their counsel, instituting wise public policies pursued with energy and resolution. Legislation was far from the only agent responsible for the progress we have seen, but it played a formative role. No small number of our cultural problems had been exacerbated by bad policy; better policy helped ameliorate them. Along the way, it also helped shape moral sentiments for the better.

We have also learned that progress can happen faster than many people thought possible. Despite the good case made by those who believe that diffidence, skepticism, and self-limitation are the prerequisites of sound policymaking, sometimes what is needed is a bold break with the past. There will always be unintended consequences, but even these need not always be for the worse, and the prospect of such unintended consequences should not paralyze us from taking action. Guided by a modest sense of possibility, and by realistic notions of the limits of politics, reform can succeed. Daniel P. Moynihan, right about many things, was wrong in predicting without qualification that the "horror" of welfare reform would bring "loathsome" consequences.

And we have learned the trap of fatalism. In the late 1990's, Paul Weyrich, a founding leader of the "religious Right," circulated a public letter declaring that America was "caught up in a cultural collapse of historic proportions, a collapse so great that it simply overwhelms politics." In the face of this descent into "something approaching barbarism," Weyrich urged people of faith to adapt a "strategy of separation." "We need," he wrote, "some sort of quarantine."

But no such separation or quarantine is possible; there is no safe harbor to which to retreat. Nor is one necessary. Problems that may seem intractable at one moment—violence and disorder, harmful and reckless conduct—can yield, and yield quickly, to the right policies and to a determined citizenry. Human problems, products of human failings, can be addressed at least in part by human ingenuity.

Culture itself, finally, exhibits an ebb and flow as surely as economies pass through cycles of ups and downs. In *The Great Disruption* (1999), Francis Fukuyama cited historical examples of societies undergoing periods of moral decline followed by periods of moral recovery. In our case, too, he argued, the aftermath of the cultural breakdown of the 1960's had already triggered and was now giving way to a reassessment and recovery of social

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and moral norms. Such "re-norming" will not occur in every social class all at once; in some instances it may take hold in one stratum but not in another. That is partial progress, but progress nevertheless.

Despite persistent anomalies and backslidings, some species of cultural re-norming certainly seems to have been occurring in this country over the past decade-and-a-half, and it is fascinating to observe in whose hearts its effects have registered most strongly. In attitudes toward education, drugs, abortion, religion, marriage, and divorce, the current generation of teenagers and young adults appears in many respects to be more culturally conservative than its immediate predecessors. To any who may have written off American society as incorrigibly corrupt and adrift, these young people offer a powerful reminder of the boundless inner resources still at our disposal, and of our constantly surprising national resilience.

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My Short March Through China

Gary Rosen

Of the ways one might choose to visit China for the first time, traveling with a delegation of American journalists, as I did in September, is not ideal. In addition to the usual frustrations of group touring, there is the burden of being "media friends," as our Chinese hosts liked to call the nine of us (six from newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, and *Boston Globe*, two from magazines, and one from a Texas television station). Our primary job was to attend official meetings—that is, to sit at long tables in dreary conference rooms, listening to bureaucrats run through their talking points and repeat the Delphic slogans ("peaceful rise," "harmonious society," "putting people first") with which the Communist party makes known its priorities. If we were lucky, the bureaucrats spoke English; often, we had to endure line-by-line translations. Though the standard tourist stops were also on our itinerary—we wandered the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, sampled the shopping bounty of Shanghai, cruised Hong Kong's Victoria Harbor—free time was scarce. Leisurely exploration was not on the agenda.

But such travel has its advantages, too, especially in terms of access to the Chinese government, an organism notoriously closed to outsiders. One co-sponsor of our trip was the East-West Center, a Honolulu-based education and research institute funded primarily by the U.S. government and involved in various kinds of foreign-policy wonkery and trans-Pacific bridge-building. The other co-sponsor, the Better Hong Kong Foundation (BHKF), is a very different sort of enterprise.

When *Fortune* ran a cover story in 1995 entitled "The Death of Hong Kong," arguing that the British colony's handover to China in two years would make it a "global backwater," the adverse publicity caused a panic among local business interests. Some of the savvier tycoons—many of them with substantial investments on the mainland—launched the BHKF in order to provide a brighter picture. In the common parlance of Hong Kong politics, the foundation is "pro-Beijing": it has friends in high places and the standing to ask them for favors. As one member of our group, a writer who covers Asia for the *Economist*, told me about our itinerary, "Meetings like this are no easy thing to get."

For the Chinese government, every visitor, even the casual tourist, represents an opportunity to make a positive impression—to let the world know of China's progress under the sage guidance of the Communist party. But American journalists fresh off the plane are potential troublemakers and have to be handled with special care. Predisposed to criticize government policy and to distrust official pronouncements, they have to be brought around gently to the desired image of a dynamic, prudently modernizing China. There are several ways to

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try to shape the experience of "media friends" so as to bring about this result: through flattery and bonhomie, with creature comforts and small luxuries, and, most of all, by regulating the sort of contacts they make during their short stay.

To be on the receiving end of such treatment is no bad deal, I can attest; my two-week trip was a pleasure in many ways and, for a China neophyte like myself, an extraordinary education. But I was often reminded of Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims* (1981), the cold-war classic about the manipulation of wide-eyed Western intellectuals who visited the Communist bloc. Today's China is not the Soviet Union or Castro's Cuba, and none of us was a credulous fellow traveler. But we, too, were subjected to what Hollander called, in his memorable phrase, the "techniques of hospitality."

THE VAST hall for passport control at the Beijing airport is about as efficient at processing visitors as any that I have encountered. With Olympic banners and countdown clocks all over the capital, the Chinese are making sure that they can handle international travelers whose idea of "One World, One Dream" (the ubiquitous slogan for the 2008 games) includes certain standards of service. The last order of business for a passenger getting his passport checked and stamped is to register a snap opinion of his experience: a console lights up with two green happy-face buttons ("very good" and "satisfactory") and two red frowny-face buttons ("slow" and "poor service"). I cheerfully pressed the first.

Having collected our luggage, refreshed ourselves with coffee and green-tea "lattes" from Starbucks, and acquired some yuan (mine from a handy Citibank ATM), we emerged into the main arrival hall, where we were immediately greeted by Mr. Huang. Huang Liming, as his business card informed us, is the deputy director of the Europe, North America, and Oceania division of the information department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A gregarious, quick-witted man, with previous stints not only at the Chinese embassy in Baathist Baghdad but as a visiting scholar at Stanford's Hoover Institution, he would be our constant companion while on the mainland. Mr. Huang was our government minder.

It was through his good offices that most of our sessions in Beijing and Shanghai were made possible. With an eye to the stories about China lately in American headlines, our schedule included top officials at: the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine (AQSIQ); the State Environmental Protection Agency; the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee; the National Development and Reform Commission; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Shanghai branch of the Bank of China; the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences; the Shanghai World Expo 2010; and the Development Research Center of the Shanghai Municipal Government. Thankfully, a few non-governmental sessions also found their way on to our schedule. We spent a too-short hour with journalism students at Peking University, met the editors of Sohu.com (one of China's leading Internet portals), and had lunch sessions with representatives of two prominent Hong Kong-based property developers in Shanghai, where we also toured a General Motors plant.

For our hosts, the purpose of the trip was twofold: to highlight China's astonishing economic growth and, at the same time, to assure us that growth was not the government's only concern. On the first count, they had nothing to worry about. Being impressed by the economic spectacle of Beijing and Shanghai does not require much in the way of encouragement. One might have an abstract sense of the scale and density of China's hyper-development, but seeing it on foot or from the window of a minibus is another thing altogether. The massive, anonymous glass-and-steel office towers and concrete apartment blocs simply go on forever, and the traffic is a heart-stopping game of chicken, with bicycles, "trishaws," and motorized carts flowing heedlessly into lanes of overloaded trucks and speeding Buicks and BMW's. This is the ground-level view of a decade-and-a-half of roughly 10-percent annual growth in GDP, a period during which hundreds of millions of Chinese have been lifted from poverty.

Nor is it all urban bleakness. With the approach of the Olympics (and the media spotlight it will bring), beautification has become a priority in Beijing, and greenery, flowers, and roadside landscaping are unexpectedly common. The colossal "bird's nest" stadium that will be the main Olympic venue is a dramatic, playful piece of architectural sculpture, and several of the other new sports facilities are similarly stylish. Some commercial complexes, like the sleek Tsinghua Science Park, where Sohu.com shares office space with the likes of Google, Microsoft, and Sun Microsystems, would look at home in Palo Alto. In Shanghai, we visited Xintiandi, an upscale shopping and restaurant district built not by demolishing the old neighborhood—the usual Chinese practice—but by renovating several blocks of handsome, traditional *shikumen* (stone gate) houses.

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As for the harsher consequences of the country's breakneck growth, our Chinese interlocutors were ready to acknowledge problems and open to the need for reform—at least so long as we steered clear of political fundamentals. Li Changjiang, the minister of AQSIQ (the product-safety agency), insisted that the toxic pet food and lead-painted toys that had caused such a flap in the U.S. were anomalies. Only a small fraction of Chinese exports were "substandard," he said, but "we will dedicate 100 percent to solving that 1-percent problem." His agency had already launched a "rectification campaign" that would monitor the supply and manufacturing chains "from A to Z." To drive home his point, Mr. Li escorted us down the hall to a room where an array of real-time video feeds—some from factories, others from border crossings, several using infrared detection—demonstrated his agency's (alarming) capacity for surveillance.

Not to be outdone, the officials who greeted us at the State Environmental Protection Agency listed, as far as I could tell, every international environmental agreement that China has signed and every domestic anti-pollution measure that it has adopted in recent years. In a warm, airless conference room, a stern woman from the policy division spoke to us about the draft laws on water pollution of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress, about "green credits" and newly instituted fines, about the eighteen categories of information that will be made available to the public as part of a "special information-disclosure mechanism." As I fought to keep my eyes open, I even recorded in my notebook that "the central government has made a schedule for the closing of certain alcohol- and paper-making factories."

Still more disarmingly, officials often spoke of their desire to bring China up to the highest international standards. We were constantly reminded that, despite its recent progress, China is "still a developing country," and that it has much to learn from the U.S. and Europe. This was no idle compliment. The best translator we encountered had a master's degree in international relations from Cambridge; one economist had a Ph.D. from Rice, another from the University of Pittsburgh. An uncannily American-seeming professor of journalism at Peking University had earned her doctorate in communications at, it turned out, the University of Iowa, and the students in her class were themselves hoping to study overseas. A pro-Beijing political activist in Hong Kong cited his degrees from Stanford right on his business card. In China, as in the rest of the world, the American university system still commands respect.

And so does the U.S. itself as a beacon of modernization. At the National Development and Reform Commission, the deputy director-general for "economic system reform" told us proudly (if implausibly) that "there is no big difference between China and the U.S." with regard to property rights and private ownership. "We have learned a great deal from Western countries," he said, "and look forward to more assistance from your side." An official at the Bank of China sounded a similar note: "I know that you are from the United States, the most developed country in the world, so I hope you will help us with your suggestions."

For a group of American reporters, attending such meetings day after day creates a peculiar psychological dynamic, one very different from an ordinary journalistic setting. Our sessions typically lasted an hour and followed a tightly scripted protocol. We would enter with business cards in hand, distribute them to anyone of prominence who greeted us, sit for a presentation, and then, time permitting, ask a few questions. At the conclusion of every session, one of us would rise to thank our speaker and to present a small gift from the group (a light-up pen gizmo from the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, a *Seattle Times* baseball cap, etc.) and a plaque from the Better Hong Kong Foundation. Finally, we would all gather around for a group photo to commemorate the happy event.*

Regularly treated like representatives of the U.S., we could not avoid the feeling that, whatever our professional responsibilities, part of our job was to act as goodwill ambassadors. We were eager to make a positive impression, to show the right mix of curiosity, appreciation, and politeness. When Mr. Huang pointed out this or that Chinese achievement, our inclination was to praise it, as if wanting to let the Ministry of Foreign Affairs know that, yes, we really did like the country. Above all, we did not wish to give offense or to confirm our hosts' preconceptions about American "China-bashing."

This spirit of diplomatic courtesy was encouraged, too, by our gratitude for a range of amenities. The tedium of serial meetings with Beijing bureaucrats was made more endurable by our stay at the lovely Kuntai Royal Hotel—complete with spa and gym, tiled pool, satellite TV, marbled bath-

* Samples of these and other photos from the trip can be found on the website of the Better Hong Kong Foundation: www.betterhongkong.org/eng/?section=gallery.

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rooms, and large, luxurious beds. Generous conviviality also brought relief from our packed schedule. Qin Gang, the chief spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, welcomed us to Beijing with a thirteen-course dinner. In Shanghai, we lunched at the private clubhouse of Vincent Lo, the Hong Kong-based developer of Xintiandi, listening to pitchmen from his company while we enjoyed beautifully presented haute cuisine and his private-label Bordeaux. Our stay in Hong Kong began with a cruise to nearby Lamma Island, for seafood alfresco, aboard the yacht of Ronnie Chan, another luminary of the Hong Kong real-estate world and the chairman of the Better Hong Kong Foundation. Though absent for that outing, the affable, opinionated Chan—a U.S. citizen, pal of Henry Kissinger, and fixture at Davos—hosted a dinner for us the next night at the chic China Club.

The goodies that our hosts and sponsors lavished on us were not enough to buy our fealty, but the first-class treatment did provide a subtle counterweight to the less agreeable aspects of our tour. Pollution was a constant subject of our casual banter. The dense haze in Beijing was painful to breathe during our first two days, and several of us developed mild respiratory ills; only heavy rains finally cleared the air of the oppressive particulates. Nor could we get over the abominable water quality, even at our high-end hotels, where turning on a tap would release a mildly sulfurous, sometimes brownish flow.

More troubling, as the trip went on, was the almost comical defensiveness of Mr. Huang, whose assignment seemed to be shielding our eyes from any sight that might possibly reflect badly on China. On one occasion, as we waited in the sparkling, modern lobby of the Bank of China, we witnessed a shouting match between a delivery woman and a security guard. When one of us asked Mr. Huang to shed some light on the dispute, he was annoyed: "Why are you not looking at the architecture, the beautiful building?" Amused by this reflex, a prankster in our group, from the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, told Mr. Huang that he had spent his free time the previous evening among beggars on the street, including a man covered with burns who claimed that "the secret police did this to me." The spoof deeply alarmed Mr. Huang: "You're not going to write about this, are you?"

MY OWN provocations took a different form. Feeling compromised by my status as a "media friend" (and slightly guilty about our travel perks), I made it my job to ask contentious questions. At Sohu.com, I pressed the website's managing editor to describe how censorship worked: "What specific words are you required to block—Tibet, Tiananmen, explicit references to sex?" The poor woman shifted nervously, glanced at Mr. Huang, and said with an uncomfortable laugh, "Let's talk about sex," adding that her company's goal was "to build a harmonious society."

The Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee, as one might expect, was the slickest operation we encountered, its shiny glass-and-steel headquarters emblazoned with the names of corporate sponsors and filled with young people who looked as if they had just walked off the campus of NYU. The committee's spokesman, Sun Weide, wanted us to know how much progress had been made in preparing for the games, particularly on the crucial issue of pollution. Thanks to a range of measures, he informed us, two-thirds of the days in Beijing now had "good air quality." As he spoke to us in a glass-walled conference room, the smog outside was so thick that nearby buildings were visible only in outline. "Is this a 'good' air day?," I asked, pointing toward the street. Without missing a beat, he replied, "it takes an expert to determine that." (Apparently embarrassed by this answer, he later sent an e-mail telling us that, in fact, the day registered at an unacceptable level on the air-pollution index.)

Mr. Sun was more categorical, however, about the sort of non-athletic activities that would not be welcome during the Olympics. The games are "a celebration of sports," he said, "not a political convention." When I asked him what would happen if protesters wished to speak out about Taiwan or the human-rights situation in China, he said that "the public-security apparatus would decide what is appropriate," noting (without apparent irony) that "this is how it is done in every country."

Our most memorable session took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where we met with Liu Jieyi, the director-general in charge of Sino-American relations. A smooth-talking diplomat whose previous postings included time in New York with the Chinese mission at the UN, Mr. Liu spoke about China's efforts "to play a constructive role in dealing with global problems," its desire "to work for peaceful as opposed to military solutions," and so forth. Not eager to hear more of this boilerplate, I asked him how he explained to audiences in the U.S. and Europe why rule by the Communist party was still legitimate, especially at a time when most of the world had accepted democratic accountability and no one, least of all in China, still believed in Marxism.

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Briefly ruffled by the question, he went on at some length, and delivered a remarkable answer. It turns out that the Communist party of China does not rule alone. Indeed, there are "eight other parties, all with representatives in the People's Congress," where "democratic supervision and collective decision-making" prevail. No party in China, he emphasized, "can exercise power unchecked." As for Marxism, its true meaning concerns achieving a "balance between economic growth and social factors." It contains "no dogma," and requires only that its adherents pay strict attention to "the actual conditions of a country, its changing dynamics."

This lesson done, we moved on to other matters until it was time for a final question. Someone asked (well, it was me again) how Mr. Liu could reconcile his presentation of China's peace-loving ways with Beijing's clear position that, if Taiwan were to declare independence, the mainland would invade—a threat made more credible by its arms build-up across the Taiwan Strait and its provocative military exercises in recent years. Mr. Liu did not like my use of the word "provocative." In the first place, he said, "You should phrase your questions with more respect." More to the point, he rejected the underlying premise: "China has a population of 1.3 billion people, including the 23 million people of Taiwan. It is not for them to decide their own status."

None of this was exactly surprising, since it adhered closely to long-standing Chinese policy. What was surprising, as we shook hands and prepared to leave, was Mr. Liu's insistence that his remarks were entirely off the record. This was news to us. All of our sessions, unless restricted in some way beforehand, were explicitly *on* the record, and we had been busily taking notes, with our tape recorders in plain sight. Liu Jieyi, in all his worldliness, was perfectly aware of what we were doing. Out of pique at my impertinence or perhaps because he did not like having lost his cool, he wanted the interview to go away.

This task fell to Mr. Huang, who called us together in the lobby once we were back at the hotel. "I need you to tell me that you won't report about this," he said. "It is best to respect the host; that is the international practice." Pressure had plainly been brought to bear on him, and several in the group, feeling that they had no particular use for Mr. Liu's words (and not wishing to jeopardize our sponsors or future trips), said they were unlikely to write about the session. Others, myself included, were less accommodating. One member of the group explained that she would find it hard to continue with the tour if the rules were continually changed after interviews. "We are not Chinese journalists," she told Mr. Huang, "and this smacks of censorship."

Knowing that I considered the material from the session valuable and might well use it, Mr. Huang pulled me aside several more times the next day to ask again that I "respect the host," adding that if I did, "I would get better interviews the next time." The threat in this, as reporters who cover China informed me, was that my future access might be limited; denying visas is a favorite tactic for punishing Western journalists who upset the authorities. But as I said to Mr. Huang, I was unsure that I would ever again report from China, and I could not relent on a key journalistic principle. Moreover, I felt obliged to tell him, his effort to suppress the story had *become* the story.

Mr. Huang continued to be civil to me after this, but our relationship lost its easy good humor. At one point, he urged me to get past my "cold-war thinking" and understand that China "is not a threat." I assured him that I did not view China as another Soviet Union, and that I was impressed by the country's economic and social progress. My worry, I said, was politics, and how the Communist party would respond to a process of modernization that it had initiated but over which it could not hope to maintain control.

For the final leg of our trip, in Hong Kong, we left behind Mr. Huang and his colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Better Hong Kong Foundation was now our exclusive guide, and its approach to selling us on the virtues of Beijing's rule was more effective. Quite simply, we could see for ourselves how wrong *Fortune* had been in declaring Hong Kong "dead" with the arrival, in 1997, of "one country, two systems." Though the flag of the People's Republic now flies alongside the five petals of Hong Kong's white-flower emblem, the "special administrative region" has retained its British-style liberties and governance, and is prospering as never before.

One obvious benefit of Hong Kong's return has been an influx of consumers from the mainland, especially in search of Western luxury goods. As the chief government economist explained to us, "People from Hong Kong have always gone to Shenzhen [across the border in China] to buy fake Gucci and Prada. Now Chinese with money come here to buy the real thing. We spend $200 there; they spend $2,000 here." Chinese companies have

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also set up offices in Hong Kong so that they can get listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange and find world-class accountants, lawyers, and other professionals. Since 2003, the local economy has grown at a robust 7 percent a year.

And, of course, the economic relationship goes the other way as well. Hong Kong interests are deeply involved on the mainland. C.Y. Leung, a local real-estate-services magnate who is a top adviser to Hong Kong's chief executive (and who hosted an elegant lunch for our group at the exclusive Hong Kong Club), helped the Chinese launch their first "special economic zone" in the mid-1980's. Vincent Lo, whose company's hospitality we enjoyed in Shanghai, is often referred to as the "king of *guanxi*" (connections) because of his close ties with Chinese officials; his first big project, more than two decades ago, was a hotel built in partnership with Shanghai's Communist Youth League.

The chairman of Plaza 66, Ronnie Chan's premier property in Shanghai, neatly summed up the attitude of Hong Kong's elites. China, he told us, is like a "big toy," a place where you can make money much more easily than in the U.S. On the mainland, he said, "once you get permission for a project, you have permission—there's no guy on the planning board making trouble, no lawsuits, no environmental-impact statements." Democratic change in China, he warned us, would bring "chaos," not least in the form of a messy, unpredictable business environment.

As it happens, these same elites are also averse to the expansion of democracy and democratic procedures in Hong Kong itself. Though it was widely expected that Hong Kong would have universal suffrage for public offices within a decade of the turnover, Beijing has had unsurprising second thoughts, and its local supporters have followed suit. Ordinary citizens have some say in who governs them—they choose a portion of the legislative council and of the electors for chief executive—but most power remains in the hands of Hong Kong's notables, the wealthy, jet-setting businessmen whose photos fill the pages of a red-satin-covered commemorative book given to us by the local office of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its modest title: *Ten Years of Glory*.

THIS COZY, corporatist arrangement is, with obvious differences, the same system that has emerged on the mainland since China began the process of "reform and opening up." Capitalists, it turns out, can get along quite well with Communists, just so long as the latter do not take their professed ideology too seriously. I asked C.H. Tung, the shipping tycoon hand-picked by Beijing a decade ago to serve as Hong Kong's first chief executive, if the Communist party was still Marxist. He smiled indulgently and said, "That is a question of definition, but the party really has done wonderful things for China."

Tung's adulation is hard to stomach, especially as a historical matter, but he has a point. After decades of Maoist dogma, the Communist party, to its credit, did finally recognize the need to release the industry and entrepreneurialism of the Chinese people. Indeed, the party itself went into business, finding eager partners around the world. The results are plain to see in the dramatically higher living standards of Beijing, Shanghai, and the other cities frequented by Westerners. Visitors are carefully insulated from the uglier realities of today's China—widespread human-rights abuses, persecuted national minorities, crushing rural poverty, pervasive corruption, forced relocations to make way for highways, skyscrapers, and Olympic facilities—but the new prosperity itself is a palpable fact.

The flush times cannot last forever, though, and the Communist party has no other real claim to authority. As Tung himself discovered, after being forced from office in Hong Kong in the wake of an economic downturn and various political blunders, there is very little give in a political system so narrow at the top and so lacking in direct popular legitimacy. When the Hong Kong government failed to reflect the will of the people, they took to the streets in massive, unprecedented demonstrations.

It is Hong Kong's good fortune to possess, in addition to its corporatist elite, a vibrant civil society, the rule of law, and a free press; China has no such safety valves for the discontent of its people, no resilience in its politics. The echo chamber of today's Chinese regime—with its slogans and show trials, its claims of expertise and openness, its pretense of oversight and accountability—cannot do the work of pluralist democracy. As James Madison knew, an extended republic, even a "people's" republic, requires institutional checks and balances if it is not to devolve into a tyranny—or to remain one.

THE SESSION in China to which my thoughts have constantly returned was our brief visit at Peking University to talk with a group of undergraduates studying journalism. After they had answered a few questions about their career aims and Internet habits, I felt obliged to ask them about an obvious subject. "Back in 1989," I said, "many students from Peking University were involved in the

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protests in Tiananmen Square. Some of them were arrested, others were killed. What do you know about all this? Do you discuss it? Do you consider it a good thing, a bad thing, or what?"

After some tittering and an awkward silence, they began to speak up, and they were not happy with me. A sweet-faced young man said that "some people in the West want to use [Tiananmen] to hurt the government," though he also admitted that "we don't have much information about it." A woman in a yellow T-shirt with "Funky Monkey" printed across it asked why Americans "always focused on the past." Another said that her mother had told her the demonstrations were quashed because otherwise China "would have broken up like the Soviet Union." Still another girl, having done her homework, asked if we knew our own nation's history of such events, and mentioned the 1970 shootings at Kent State.

Disappointed that we could not discuss these issues at greater length—and outside the hearing of their teacher and Mr. Huang—I was pleasantly surprised a few weeks after my return to the U.S. to receive an e-mail from one of the students, a junior named Yuan. She confirmed that the students had indeed been "prudential and cautious" in their remarks, but she also said, as I myself had gathered at the session, that their sentiments were genuine, especially in the face of questioning by foreigners. It is our "instinct," she wrote, "to defend our country."

More interesting to me, as we continued our e-mail correspondence, was learning about Yuan herself and her ambitions. Both of her parents had left their hometowns at an early age to look for jobs; her father is now the operations manager for the metals division of a large multinational corporation, and her mother works for a state-owned enterprise. Yuan's great hope is to attend the journalism school at Columbia and to spend time in the U.S., the "dream nation," though she has begun to wonder if it is really as "free and impartial" as she supposes. Her preoccupation while we were exchanging e-mails was the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), which she had just taken. Wanting to recover from the stress, she had "ordered a big pizza and shared it with friends while watching *The O.C.* [a Fox teen drama], then took the yoga class as usual."

Thinking about Yuan and her friends—cosmopolitan, English-speaking students at China's most elite university—I find it difficult to imagine that the People's Republic will easily contain them. Some will undoubtedly be co-opted by economic opportunities, like much of China's middle class; others will end up serving the Chinese state, perhaps in a role like that of Mr. Huang, practicing the "techniques of hospitality" on foreign visitors. But it seems just as likely that, following the lead of the previous generation, they will begin to ask why China, alone among the world's great nations, cannot enjoy the full range of modern freedoms. Their protestations aside, they may yet have their own Tiananmen. If it comes to that, one can only pray that this time it turns out very differently.

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Many Seconds Into the Future—A Story

John J. Clayton

ALMOST EVERY day now, Daniel Hirsch looks up from his desk in the Boston office where he practices law or stands on clear fall days on the back deck of his house in Newton, a cup of coffee in his hand, and sends his spirit 200 years into the future. Two-hundred years, lifting above himself, seeing himself tiny down below—from that vantage point, he's on a cliff of time looking down into a valley in which, to those below, everything seems to matter intensely, while from this cliff all that turmoil in the heart is simply . . . interesting, part of a dance, a little sad, a little funny. From this cliff it's not such an important concern whether he lives until he's eighty—or only till sixty, as will in fact be the case, for this, his 60th year, is almost sure to be the year of his death.

Considering things this way, though alive, he's as good as dead. A hundred years from now, the difference of these few months, even a difference of a few lost years, will seem an eyeblink. After all, he's not Mozart, he's not Schubert. What's a few years more or less?

At some point, he wants to believe, God will roll up the scenery and redeem us all. We'll all be our original selves at Mount Sinai hearing the thunder. As others—who knows?—will be at Mecca or Bethlehem. And God will spread a *tallit* of light over all of us and say, "I know how strange your lives seemed. Now that I can explain it to you, I don't need to, do I? The meaning is in your bones."

In the meantime, while this flicker of life—its meaning—is not known to him, the image of a cliff of time is deeply consoling. The air is clear up here. His head lifts. No one would know he's been dead for centuries, or that he won't be alive next year at this time.

It's just after the High Holy Days. He has not, it seems, been inscribed in the Book of Life.

His wife doesn't know. His teenage son and daughter don't know. His clients—mostly he handles estates—don't know. He's left extensive notes in each file. He's provided as much clarity and tax savings as he can. He's burned separate CD's for everyone in the family: his brother in Ohio, his sister-in-law in Denver, two old friends, his ex-wife Jennifer, their grown son Jonah, his teenagers Alyssa and Jeremy, his wife Molly.

Mostly dry, practical stuff. No profound word-from-beyond-the-grave. "Molly, please make sure that Alyssa, when she has a home of her own, gets my grandmother's samovar." And to Jeremy, "In case I leave you before the summer, the materials concerning your trip to Israel are in the bottom drawer of my desk upstairs. It's paid for. You take that trip, mister. You can say kaddish for me over there just as well as here."

In each of the audio letters, he makes sure to say he loves wife or child or friend—or Jennifer, who

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was once wife. "Jennifer, you've been a wonderful, funny, generous ex-wife to me. Isn't it a great joke that we made such terrible mates and then such good friends?" No solemn philosophizing, and nothing about God, though each member of his family knows that in a secret cave inside his chest he stokes a sense of the holy.

Is he sad? Of course he's sad. He won't be a support to Jeremy and Alyssa through college. He won't be there for their marriages, the births, please God, of their children and Jonah's children. He'd planned to travel with Molly when they were empty nesters. It's not going to happen.

Is he afraid? Of course. He's been told to expect seizures and memory loss, possibly nausea, headaches, neurological incapacities. He sees his flesh rotting in the ground. He goes through bouts of panic. He's been told he's lucky—there won't be much pain. An operation might give him an additional couple of months. He's opted out.

For as long as possible, he wants just to live an ordinary life. Soon he won't be able to hide symptoms; then the slope down is steep, maybe a two-month tumble. It disturbs him that at the end he won't have a lucid relationship to his family. And how will he come to God with a clear soul? If he ever needed to do *teshuvah*, to return, to change his life, now is the time.

A MONTH AGO he had a severe headache; he lay down for hours. "You never have headaches," Molly said. "If this lasts, I want you to see Dr. Schwab." The headache went away. A week later, just before Rosh Hashanah, as he walked across the Boston Common toward the subway at Park Street, a brilliant, sunny day, the look of things altered. It didn't happen all at once, but his visual field was breaking up: trees, faces, paths were either intensely bright, too bright to look at without squinting, or dim, deeply shadowed. Spots of non-seeing, and over everything a glow.

It didn't scare him; it made what he saw strangely beautiful. A few times at Swarthmore, he'd tried mescaline. Mescaline enriches your visual field, can turn it into a post-impressionist canvas. The colors! Crossing the Common was a little like that. It made him stop, stare, breathe deeply.

"Classic migraine symptoms," his doctor told him over the phone. "You don't have a history of migraines? Well, come in, we'll take a look. But there's nothing to worry about."

He wasn't worried. In fact, he rather hoped it would happen again. Schwab said, "Well, you know, given the headache—and the left side of your face: you do know it's drooping?—an MRI wouldn't be overkill. Could be a tiny stroke." Daniel was sucked into the howling, cramped coffin of the MRI. In a few hours a radiologist and an oncologist diagnosed glioblastoma multiformes, deadliest of the brain cancers.

They stared at the MRI, clamped to Dr. Schwab's light box. "So. I need to send you on to a surgeon," he said, sighing. "They'll do a biopsy. At the same time, we'll see if they can debulk some of the tumor."

"Some of."

"Right. Some. I'm afraid so, Dan. Look. Fact is, your odds are less than poor. Time is short. A few months. At best a few months. But I'm not an oncologist, I'm not a surgeon. You go for a biopsy. I'll set up the appointment. You've got insurance."

"Let me think about it."

"Dan, no—a biopsy. Not something to think about. That's your next logical step. Please, look at this." He pointed at the MRI. "You see that spidery-looking shadow?"

"A spider? More like a tarantula," Daniel laughed. "Or some science-fiction alien. Will you look at that son of a bitch! That's in me?" Its fuzzy tentacles, as they reached out, seemed to be growing new tentacles. It wasn't in his brain or on his brain, it was etched into the pattern of his brain tissue. "I'll get back to you, doctor. For now, let's keep this between us."

He shook hands and strode down the hallway to the main reception area. He knew that if he turned around he'd see Schwab staring after him.

After his talk with the doctor, after a little research on the web, he knew he couldn't stop the creature from taking over. Not by surgery, not by chemo or radiation. He might win a few weeks' reprieve, but at what cost?

"It's nothing. Stress," he told Molly. "Just what you thought. I'm working too hard. I need to take time to live a normal life. An ordinary life."

"What I've been telling you."

"Absolutely. I intend to spend more time with you and Jeremy and Alyssa."

Only Harry Barnett, his firm's senior partner, and Tim Asher, his friend since law school, know the whole story. "I'm staying on. When I can't do a good job," he says, "I'll tell you. And if you see things I can't see, ways I'm screwing up, just let me know."

Harry Barnett, the old man in the firm, rests his elbows on the walnut conference table, chin on folded hands. "This is really rotten, boy. You sure you want to stay on? Don't you want to bail out? Travel somewhere? Visit friends?"

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"Travel? No. What I've left unlived," Daniel says, "is ordinary life. I've lived it but scarcely knew it. That's what I want to concentrate on, and that's why I can't tell Molly or the kids. Not till I start to slide. Because as soon as I tell them, the time won't be ordinary."

Tim adds: "Doctors can be wrong, too. You look great, Dan. Maybe it's a misdiagnosis."

Daniel, a tiny headache starting up: "From your lips to God's ear."

But he can't count on this message being received. He sits cross-legged on a meditation mat in his study, and rather than focusing on his breath as he usually does, he imagines light perforating the top of his head and pouring in, shriveling the monster. After a half-hour he's mellow but not optimistic.

"MORE TIME with you and the kids." These children came to him late. Jonah, his son with Jennifer, is thirty-three, married, living in Seattle. They talk on the phone, talk eagerly of Jonah's successes—he's the youngest dean at the University of Washington—but they don't see a lot of each other. Strange. When Daniel was a very young father, living and fighting with Jennifer, he focused all his love on Jonah. Even when he was busy clerking after law school, when he'd been taken into a large Boston practice and needed to work impossibly hard, he took Jonah to Fenway, took him backpacking. Though he and Jennifer were dead to one another, he had to show that he had love to give.

It's been different, easier, with Jeremy and Alyssa—he's loved them more naturally. As his career flourished, he's watched them grow up, if too often just going through the motions. It's not that sometimes he misses Alyssa's violin recitals, or doesn't always see Jeremy pitch. It's that when he does go, often only his body is there, while he's scribbling points in a notebook.

Well, except for the time of his breakup with Jennifer, he was never very expressive. She used to call him "Mr. Cool" when they were on good terms, "Mr. Chilly" when not. "I can't stand how secretive you are," she would say. Which is funny, because now as friends they share secrets, gossip together easily.

Still, keeping this secret feels in tune with the rest of his life. He believes it comes from his father, a man who narrowed his eyes a lot and locked his secrets behind them. They quarreled when Daniel was in high school, and then he simply cut off until he was in law school and his father near death. The big man, maybe 220 pounds, once a semi-pro boxer, then a middle manager for General Mills—what secrets, after all?—had shrunk sadly, flesh sagging on the big bones. He still couldn't talk to Daniel. He'd always bragged about Daniel's smarts, but was embarrassed that his son was a lousy athlete. Daniel remembers sitting by his father's bed in the hospital. One of the last things the old man said to him was, "I never *could* teach you to hit a ball, could I?"

Just look at Jeremy, he thinks. There's the athlete he wanted me to be. Lean but powerful, Jeremy is a terrific pitcher, a fast wing in soccer. It must have skipped a generation. The way my grandfather's *tefillin*, which my dad gave me for my bar mitzvah but never used himself, skipped a generation. Daniel puts on *tefillin* and prays almost every day.

So why does he feel his father inhabiting his body, breathing out his heavy breath through Daniel? Maybe the connection is part of the reparations he needs to make. His *teshuvah*.

And maybe another part is driving Jeremy and Alyssa to school in the morning instead of letting them take the bus. Actually he lets Alyssa drive, not only to give her practice but as a precaution. Suppose he has another episode like the one on the Common?

"You sure, Dad?" Alyssa asks.

"What *is* this? You're always so busy in the morning," Jeremy says.

"How much longer," he says, "will we be together like this? I mean, soon you guys will be out of the house. Am I right? I'm right."

"All day long you get paid to be right," Jeremy says. "Not with us. Am I right?"

Jeremy, with his wild curly hair, has what Alyssa calls "attitude." One minute he's tender, climbing up on the bed between his father and mother to watch TV, the next he's uncommunicative or hostile, like Daniel himself as a teen, and scrappy with his sister. Now she wrecks his good mood. "You have to be right, don't you? Brother dear, why don't you save it for debate club?"

"Blow it out thy bottom, dear sister," he says in a thick stage-British accent, and lifting his bottom adds a Bronx cheer.

"Dad!" Alyssa groans. "Uch! He's so vulgar! You're really disgusting, Jeremy."

He asked for ordinary, didn't he?

EVENINGS NOW, Daniel's home in time for dinner. If Molly works late at the lab, and he makes dinner—he's always been a weekend cook—they wait for her. After all, he's less pressured at work, he's not taking on new clients.

Molly comes home ragged, sullen from battle with a colleague who seems to feel that her job is

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to make Molly miserable. In the past, he'd steer clear when she came home like this. Now he puts an arm around her, soothing. Each night, not just on Shabbat, he asks Alyssa to light candles, pours a full glass of wine for himself and Molly, a little for Jeremy and Alyssa. He says a blessing. They hold hands at the table. Alyssa is wearing her hair in a new way—three perfect rolls behind—and her long gold earrings catch the light of the candles. Jeremy is caught up in the ceremony, but he rolls his eyes and grins. The kids look at one another—what *is* all this? He pretends not to notice. "You're our blessing," Daniel says, reaching across the table to squeeze Molly's hand. And to Molly, "you're my blessing." If not now, when?

Molly shakes her head and grins. "I don't get it. Daniel?"

He opens his hands wide. "Why not? You're all precious to me."

"You amaze me. But hey," she laughs, lifting forefinger and eyebrows, "don't stop!"

Daniel has a strong baritone. He sings in a community chorus. But now he has decided to drop out—"for business reasons" he tells the director. This may be the last time I listen to the Brahms piano quartets, he thinks, closing his eyes while Rubinstein and the Guaneri play for him. And making love, slowly, as he and Molly have learned to do, he thinks, this may be the very last time. It's not. They do it again a few days later, and again he thinks, this may be the very last time. Click, he says to himself, click, taking mind-photos.

There are dark times. He thinks about this house without him, his body without him. Suddenly, the room seems like an expressionist theater set, with faulty perspective and odd angles. He gets up from a chair and feels gnarling in his belly—as if the room were an airplane, tilting, dropping a sudden 200 feet. At such moments, if someone were to ask him who he is, he'd have to look at his wallet. Then it's over. He remembers; the plane levels out.

Molly's busy in her study, Jeremy's off doing homework upstairs, Alyssa pokes through a college guide. He finds himself, temples throbbing but not with pain, tumbled out of his chair onto the carpet, curled up, headphones askew. Light has washed through him.

The Schubert is playing, still the same movement. Whatever "it" was, it's taken maybe a minute.

It's starting, he thinks. Soon he'll have to tell Molly. Rousing himself, shaking his head clear, he giggles that he's so calm.

All of a sudden he yanks off the headphones and stumbles for the phone. He stands there, waiting, waiting. *Now* it rings. "Molly," he calls, "I think it's for you. It's good news."

She calls back, "Can you get that, Danny?"

He picks it up, says, "Just a minute, please." Then, "Molly?"

She takes the call, he hangs up. She shuts the door to her office. When she comes out, she's glowing. "Danny? Listen! They're offering me the directorship at the lab. Oh my God!"

He yells, "Alyssa? Jeremy? Come down here."

"It's not absolutely firm. We're talking tomorrow. I never thought—"

"Well, you deserve it."

"Danny?" She narrows her eyes at him. You *said* it was good news. How did you know? Did they call before?"

"Just a guess."

"A guess? A *guess*?"

THAT WAS the first time. You could call it *déja vu*. Experiencing *déjà vu*, you not only know you've been here before, you have a presentiment, usually vague, as to what will happen next. Daniel Hirsch's presentiments become, in the next few days, anything but vague. He knows with exactitude. Sometimes what happens turns out not to be what he expects, but often it is. Most unnerving, he's propelled not a split second but many seconds into the future.

There's a certain look to things. A vividness. Knowing in advance, he catches a sheen of light on the drapes, calls "Jeremy!" but too late—waits for the dropped cup, Jeremy's "damn!," the click of the pantry door, slush of the mop. It's more than presentiment. He feels the turmoil in Jeremy's stomach, the clenched jaw, the big breath. He goes into the kitchen to assuage—hey, no big deal—but he can feel the wall that surrounds the boy, can almost see it, makeshift and jagged. He waits, goes to the fridge for juice. After a minute the wall dissolves, turns into ordinary pride. Now it's safe for Daniel to say, "Bummer. I know how that feels. Thanks for cleaning it up."

"Sure."

And he *does* know—because for a moment he was within Jeremy's being. Maybe this damage is a gift from God. If so, it's a curious gift, suddenly to be thrust inside another person. He passes Molly on the stairs and feels a thick blur of love for her or from her, puts out a hand to graze her shoulder and feels her before he touches her. What does he feel? Not just love—he feels the anxiety she feels, too, though its content isn't clear. He guesses it's about being asked to be director of the lab. Or is it about

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him? Has she seen something? He feels family voices all around him, too blurred together for him to catch the words.

One night he lies in bed in turmoil and finally realizes that it's not his turmoil. It's from somewhere else. First he thinks it's Molly, but she's peacefully asleep. He sits in his study for a while, eyes shut, and it comes to him: his son in Seattle, it's what Jonah's feeling, something's very wrong. He makes a call.

"Dad? What are you doing up at this hour? It's one o'clock there."

"I couldn't sleep. So? What's wrong?" he asks, as if Jonah had left a voicemail message.

"What do you mean?"

"In your life."

"Oh. Nothing."

"Yes. There is. Something."

"Dad? What are you talking about? Everybody has something."

"Something particular, Jonah. Something's upsetting you."

"Dad? Well, yes." Now Jonah speaks in a guttural whisper, as if his hand is on the mouthpiece. "How do you know? There's a young woman . . ." He tells him a little about her. A graduate student—he's directing her research. He thinks about her all the time.

And Elaine? Daniel asks. "How's Elaine?" He listens, he listens.

Mr. Cool or Mr. Chill, Daniel is a good listener. At work, mostly doing estate planning, he has to be. He listens underneath what clients say in order to know what really matters to them. In private life he never talks about feelings, hates it when conversations turn in that direction. But these days, feeling pulses through. He'd better get used to it, he thinks. It's likely to last as long as I do.

Everything is so saturated, it's as if he can walk around inside Jonah's life. He feels the mess. He can't see the young woman, but he can enter into Jonah's relationship with Elaine. He's known Elaine for six years; he's very fond of her. What he can do is pray for them, enter their life and try to breathe peace into it.

Every day now, there are moments when he loses clarity and then his own peace dissolves. He's prided himself on his clear mind. What will he be without it? He avoids talking, afraid words will spill out as babble. He's becoming thick-mouthed. The words get chewed at and can't get out. Worse, at moments he searches for himself, scanning a room the way you search for something forgotten, something lost. Yet as he walks through his daily life, nobody seems to notice.

He finds himself getting sleepy, needs to close his eyes a few minutes. Sleepy.

Eyes closed, he imagines back, back, back, generation to generation, to a fiery mountain, an Israelite, his ancestor, in terror. Blare of the horn, the mountain smoking.

ONE EVENING, as he's washing up at the bathroom sink, talking to Molly about a PBS program they've watched on stem cells, he feels faint, and a high-pitched buzzing fills him. Fills . . . whom? Who is this person filled with sound? He's on a tile floor feeling warm breath on him, she's bending over him. "Daniel?" she says. "What's going on?" She? It's Molly. So he's Daniel. A moment later, he floods back into full memory. His head hurts; the light in the bathroom is horribly bright. "Please, would you turn that down?"

"Turn what down?"

"The music. No—the light, I mean." Only a little dizzy, he picks himself up, makes his way to the bed. "Sit down. This is going to be hard, Molly. Hold my hand. Hold my hand."

"You'll be all right—you must have slipped and banged your head. Breathe."

"*You* breathe. I've got to tell you something. Molly?" She sits beside him and he takes her hand. He can't find words, then says flat out, "The thing is, I've got brain cancer. I've got a bad kind. Shh, shh, shh, please. It's called glioblastoma multiformes. It's basically . . . not operable."

"*Danny*?"

"I'm sorry, Molly."

"Please, no, Danny. Danny?"

"I'm so sorry. To have to leave you all. I'm sorry."

"No, no. Danny. Why didn't you tell me? What do you mean basically not operable? Did they biopsy it? How do you know it's malignant if they didn't operate and biopsy it?"

"You can see it on the MRI. I'm trying to bracket off my death. To live an ordinary life."

"Ordinary! So that's what's going on. . . . Danny, the thing is you've been anything but ordinary. I've been feeling so close to you, and it's weird, here you are, I'm feeling close and you, you're keeping secrets. Honey, did you know one side of your face is drooping a little? It's getting worse. I thought it might be Bell's palsy. That's why I asked you to see Dr. Schwab. Oh my God. How long do we have?"

"A few weeks, maybe a few months." He knows he shouldn't say this, but it needs to come out. "Molly, I know you don't want to think about this, but you're so young, you're beautiful . . ." Twelve

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years younger, her curly hair uncolored, just touched with gray. A lovely, soft, placid face, not the face of an administrator. She fools them at the lab every day, dressing in masculine clothes. She'll marry. She must. He reminds himself to tell her so in a letter.

"Oh, shit. Shit."

"See? That's what I don't want to do. Bitterness just wastes our little bit of time. I want to live day to day. I won't be like this, so clear, very long. But we can have good days. I've been too busy to have days at all. I haven't been there. Know what I mean? I haven't been in my days."

"Oh, Danny, oh, Danny. Why can't they operate? Or do chemo?"

"Maybe we could scrounge a few more weeks—but what kind of life? Look, you can call Schwab. He'll try to get you to pressure me. It'll be awful, but I know you'll want to call."

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asks again but doesn't expect an answer.

All night in bed he holds her. They doze. She has spurts of weeping. At two or three they wake and fumble toward one another, comforting, stroking, until it mutates into making love. Daniel feels her weeping. They waken while Alyssa and Jeremy are getting ready for school.

"We've got to tell the kids," Molly says when they're alone. She's getting ready to drive out to the lab. "We can't pretend everything's normal and then you just . . . start failing."

"In a sense, it *is* normal. Right? Don't get mad, honey. It is. Every time we walk out the door we may never come back. People get hit by cars. They get heart attacks, they die. That's what people do."

"Horseshit. It's true and it's horseshit . . ."

"Okay." He laughs. "It's horseshit. We'll tell the kids after dinner," he says. "Okay?"

But Alyssa isn't home for dinner—she's at a study session. At nine she's back, standing in the hall, bookbag over her shoulder, a tall girl with almond eyes. He's amazed at the connection between them, feels what it will be like to be her when she hears.

Jeremy calls through his door—he's in the middle of something.

"Come anyway!" Molly, who's never loud, calls very loud. Jeremy comes.

They gather on cushions around the low teak coffee table. Daniel sees the administrator in his wife cranked and running. She'll handle things—handle everything. It's how she'll cope. It's good she has a way. "Your father and I have something to tell you—"

"Oh, no." Jeremy says. "No! You're *not* getting a divorce."

"Of course not," Daniel says. "Have you seen any signs of that?"

"Because it's like half my friends, their parents are getting a divorce and, well, they have this big family meeting first. Then, *what*? It better be a big deal, you're scaring me."

So he tells them. At once, Alyssa's in tears and Molly holds her. Jeremy just shakes his head; Daniel leans over to give him a hug, and Jeremy stiffens, punches him delicately in the chest.

And now there's a long battle, circling back on itself, because no matter how often Daniel says an operation won't change things, chemo won't change things, the children refuse to accept it. It's as if he were choosing to die. "You've got to try," Jeremy says. "You've got to fight."

"You've been seeing too many TV movies. This is nothing you can fight. What I want is that we don't kill the time we've got left together by griping. Okay?"

They sit around the table grieving. "How will we know," Jeremy asks, "when it starts?"

Daniel says, "I'm afraid it will be pretty obvious."

"So that's why you've been driving us to school," Alyssa says. "Oh, Dad."

He can no longer drive with them to school because he's afraid he might have what Molly calls "an episode" and not find his way back. Besides, his vision is more and more blurred, and it plays tricks on him. An ordinary life? Everything feels full of his dying. The new "normal" includes everyone checking in with him from lab or school by cellphone. "Dad? You okay?" Molly takes work home so she can monitor him, though that's not the way she puts it. "I want to spend time with you." But the time is so washed in his dying that before his mind is gone, joy is gone. They're already mourning.

One morning Molly stays home to take Daniel to his office. He's been working from out of the house, but Harry Barnett called last night, and the flatness of his voice told Daniel he needed to go in. After rush hour they drive to Copley Square, park in Daniel's assigned spot in the garage, and take the elevator to the lobby. He's been feeling pretty normal this morning, but the elevator, stuffed with souls, gets to him right away. He's bombarded. He can't fend anyone off. He gives Molly a look: you hear what I hear? A chorus of pain and desire. Or just blood in his ears. He has an image of one of those

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Spanish St. Sebastians, pierced like a porcupine. He feels punctured, and, trickling out, begins to lose coherence. He tries to explain to Molly, who's got his hand now, but he knows he's babbling.

Upstairs, the anteroom is a visual metaphor of restrained elegance. Molly squeezes his hand and sits down to read a research paper she's brought along. "You'll be okay?" Daniel says, covering up his shame for needing her. "I'll be right back."

He walks down the central corridor, legal staff to the right, lawyers to the left. First by chance, then as they hear his name, his colleagues emerge. "Daniel!" "Mr. Hirsch!" "Daniel, m'man, how you doing?" "Hey, Daniel." "Great seeing you." By the pats and handshaking he's not accustomed to, it's clear that in spite of his request to Harry and Tim, everyone knows. This annoys him. He nods and waves like a retired ballplayer, weary of the sentimental accolades that prove he's through.

At the end, the corridor turns. On the left, the window side, are the bright, paneled conference rooms, and, in the far corner, Harry's office. Harry stands outside, reaches out his hand and wraps his other arm around Daniel. "Come on in, come on in." Outside the window is downtown Boston, the curving river. Tim stands up, Nancy Schumer stands up, Charles Harris half-lifts himself from his chair for a moment.

"Well, the sooner you go into goddamn remission," Harry says, "the happier we'll all be around here."

"Thanks."

"You *believe* me," Harry says, slowly, tapping his heart—an imperative, not a question. "But," he sighs, "in the meantime . . ." The rest of his words are rushed. "Thing is, I think we need you to go squirrel-in with Charlie here—hand over your files, let him take some notes, okay?"

"Fine, if that's what you want."

"Don't get like that. We don't *want* it. You think we want it?"

"You know what I mean, Harry. If you want to get it over with now, sure. I have everything prepared. We both know I'm not going into remission."

Harry has tears in his eyes. "I don't want to get it over. Last thing I want, Danny."

Daniel puts a hand around Harry's neck. "It's okay, it's really okay. You're a sweet guy." His fingertips on Harry's thick neck seem charged. Out of the corner of his eye he notices that Tim and Charles and Nancy are looking anywhere else. "Charlie?" he says. "Let's you and me go back to my office." He's grateful that his speech is almost clear.

But a visual incident seems to be starting up. The room grows too bright. The sky, the glass of other office buildings, silver sheen of the river far below, so bright, kind of beautiful, faces dim, breaking up. That's the scary part. He sits, closes his eyes. "You guys give me a minute, okay?"

When he opens his eyes, only Harry's there.

"Charlie's down at your office, Danny. I hope that's okay. I let you rest a few minutes."

"Sure. Sure." He stands and stretches. "It's been good working with you, Harry." He gives him a brief hug, then holds on, and Harry pats, pats, pats.

ALL THESE years, it *has* been good—the work with these people its own reward. Unlikely ever to see Harry again. Tim will come over, a few other friends. He needs to say goodbye to the Edelsteins, who attended so many concerts and ate so many dinners with them. His old friend Paul Del Monte, who lives in Albuquerque now. And Jonah. Of course, Jonah. He can't bring himself to call Jonah.

Already, with this visit downtown, he's shed much of his life. Now the files are gone, his profession gone, he has become free. But twice on the drive that afternoon, as he tries to talk to Molly, he's aware the words aren't coming out right. Coherent rise and fall of his voice as if . . . dissolve . . . his sentences have rhythms of English, but he knows that only some of the words are English. He hears but can't speak right. Pain in head, head thickening. As they drive, Molly gets in touch with Dr. Schwab by cell; it's to his office in Brookline she takes him.

Daniel hears her talking to the doctor. "He knows I'm not an oncologist." Daniel can't hear Molly's answer. They leave him in the waiting room. When Schwab calls him in, it's to give him a shot of cortisone, a prescription for pain killers. "But you've got to promise me you'll see Fitzgerald. We're talking about plain comfort, Daniel, not cure. Comfort. I'll give him a heads-up. Okay? You promise?"

He doesn't want to see anyone new, but for Molly's sake he will. He makes an appointment with Fitzgerald. This afternoon, after a nap, he prints out information for Molly—his trust instruments, his file of investments, instructions to Joe Berg, their financial planner. Molly has always left these matters to Daniel. It comforts him that money is there for Jeremy's and Alyssa's tuition. He writes a covering note. He's impressed by its clarity. Easier than speech. "I suspect you won't need this house, honey. It'll be way too big once the kids are in college. Until then, you're probably better

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off not introducing any more changes into their lives. But it's up to you." He means to add, "I want you to marry again." It's too hard to write that.

Of course it's up to her; it's all up to her—unless he intends to stick around as a ghost. He half-feels like one already. There's awareness, then gap, then awareness: in, out. The phone rings in his head, he goes toward it, now it actually rings. Increasingly he feels so oppressively connected that it's too difficult for him to go shopping now, painful even to walk down a crowded street. Others suffuse him.

He doesn't want to talk to most friends. It's hard for him, hard for them. It's better, easier with those he loves. He writes—on laptop, hand too unsteady for a handwritten note. As he writes, he seems to enter them. Where are his boundaries? At moments, scanning, can't find himself. All defining separate self dull pain thickening the base of the occiput and pulsing behind forehead.

A clear note to Alyssa:

> I suspect you'll want to stay with your mother next summer and not go to Interlochen. It's loving of you, but ask her. I believe she'd rather you went. I'd rather, too. Your music is such a gift to us. When I walk in and hear you playing, it's all been worth it!

Keeps a smile on his face, even for the young rabbi, only a year with the congregation, who pays a sick call. Visits to comfort the sick are prescribed in the Talmud; but it's this young man who needs comforting. He keeps taking off his glasses, closing his eyes and rubbing them, putting his glasses on again. Daniel wants to let him know, it's all right, it's all right. He could offer the rabbi a guess or two on immortality. Different from what we imagined. "I am not contained between my hat and boots." Once, Daniel thought this was Whitman's spiritual brag. What he's intuiting is that it's true, exactly true. He is becoming dispersed—especially into his family. He and the rabbi pray *minhah*, the brief afternoon service.

He has to use a hiking pole, tip covered in duct tape, to get around the house. It's necessary . . . move slow, don't stumble. The Friday after the trip downtown, after the rabbi leaves, Daniel has a peculiar feeling he himself is at the door. Taking up the pole, he goes to open.

Jonah! A suitcase beside him, having paid off the taxi, Jonah.

"You surprised, Dad? Molly called us. Which, let me add, is more than I can say for you."

"Going to call, really, really. Gladyouhere, gladyouhere, very." Daniel is embarrassed at his slurring. He holds Jonah, smells him the way he did when Jonah a little guy. Hey. My baby.

His baby, the thirty-three-year-old dean of students, is showing Daniel a thin, pouting mouth—the injustice of not being confided in! He's not letting his father into his eyes. But anger, Daniel knows—he's seeing from inside his son—is a dam to protect Jonah from flood of grief. Still, Jonah's right—should have let him know. "How's Elaine?"

"We're okay. She's pregnant, Dad."

"Oh, Jonah, Jonah—totally wonderful. Elaine!"

"It is wonderful. I was a little crazy for a while."

"I know, I know." He lacks words, and the oh in "know" has become hard to shape, so he pats Jonah's back and shakes head up and down ferociously.

Now, all his children there, he should have things to tell them. Profound, sticking things for after he goes. Even Jennifer here—taken train up from New York to say goodbye, Jonah met her at Back Bay station. Jennifer wants to see Daniel now, while he, husband seven years, friend for life, still pretty coherent. But as they sit in the dining room, he has no words. He makes language, rehearses sentences. Is silent.

His consciousness opposite of profound. Ach, he's embarrassed . . . wears diapers.

He goes a little in, he goes a little out. He points to butter for his bread: hard-words-find.

Jeremy has become a little too sober, not bad thing . . . for him. As if to test bond between brothers, Daniel plucks invisible string joining Jonah and Jeremy, and listens to resulting music.

Teshuvah. Repentance, turning to God—what's it mean for him? Any dark evil in his life? Thinks no-no. Lot of inattention. A little bad anger. Impatience—people on one speed, he another. Well! Used to be a sports car, now not so many cylinders. Nothing like withering brain to slow you down, better than a two-by-four to get your attention. Attention hard now. He prays, *Hold Your hands me*. Words bollix up. He slips out of himself, himself scattered into being of others at table. He can be Molly-Daniel or Alyssa-Daniel, but if he doesn't try hard-hard, he becomes them all together.

In dull pain and constant blurred seeing, held by his little *mishpokheh*, his family. At the same time, he begins to feel if he lets go, another reality will hold him. "Inscribed in the Book of Life." Maybe different from what we think. He has his ugly-ugly dying to get through. Organs stop receiving messages from dying brain, then organs die. Another reality? Isn't he half-held there already? God waiting? Crooking a finger?

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The family at the table looks peaceful, everyone smiling, passing food, ordinary family, like family at Sinai. He knows better. Tension between Molly and Jennifer—friends, but not tonight. Jeremy wants to be anywhere else. "Hey, you looking good, ol' Dad," Jeremy says. Alyssa fingers a long gold earring to soothe herself, irritated by the obvious con. Daniel waves his hand, orchestra conductor, tries to make music from noise.

Alyssa resists. Begrudges his dying, his not fighting. At the table she says again, should think once more—operation, chemo. He sees: in ten years when she tells her husband the story, she'll say, "My dad just gave up." But now she shrugs it away. Most of the night, she's forced-smiling. Jeremy's performing for Jonah, acting grown-up. Everyone performing.

Daniel, too. His performance: everyone peaceful. Pretends not to know all upset and conflict they feel; pretends to believe surface. Let them feel they're fooling him—help them get through his dying. Like a midwife. Birth, birthing him. Molly, organization lady, she'll be okay sitting *shiva*. Tell stories, turn their life into show-and-tell as she lugs out books of photos for friends who make up a *minyan*. She'll hold Alyssa and Jeremy, hug Jonah, too, and they'll cry. Now his job is smile, smile.

All at once he spots Jeremy. Knows how thick with tension Jeremy, about to break this peace with a snotty, sibling dig at Alyssa—Daniel even knows the comment, something to do with her weight. Alyssa's fantasy (silly, she's so beautiful) is that she has an extra five pounds. Her plate is piled high with salad.

Jeremy makes the dig: "Got enough lettuce leaves, Aly? Let's keep those pounds off."

She gives him a look. Not sufficient. He really wants to get her. He's about to reach over to her plate and swat the lettuce leaves. Daniel knows: she'll take her plate and dump it all on his head, and then a big fight will suck up into itself unexpressed sorrow and fear at the table. End of peace. In the same instant, no plan, Daniel mimes a seizure—rolling up eyes, shaking, tumbling off chair onto floor. He lies there twitching.

Everything, thank God, stops. Jeremy's action is blocked, conflict dissolves, and Daniel realizes—frustrating!—it was all exactly meant to be. Fake seizure, everybody helping, part of the *déjà vu*. God fooling him!

He speaks, but knows he is saying nothing. Not intelligible. *Intelligible*: intellect, intelligent, tell. He tries to send out telling sentences but exactly like speaking college French has to rehearse a correct construction, remember words, and all too much effort from start of sentence to end . . . Remembers "ordinary." Some joke. You think you die, first you go dim, say goodbye. But no. Another place takes you, another frame of reference, and everyone seems so far away, words far away. Silence. Silence. Somebody asking, somebody asking. Conscientious, like a good father, husband, friend, tries hard to push words out. Silence.

He stands up and with walking stick in hand like a pilgrim, trudges to bed. Already Daniel Hirsch is half-somewhere else.

MOLLY:

Molly tugs hard at the drawer where the albums are kept. Uncollected photos spill out on the carpet of her bedroom. She catches sight of Jeremy lifted, by her and Daniel, over a whitecap that's run its course. *Click*. Jeremy looks two, Alyssa would have been four. Who took it? A friend? Jiggling, she pulls the drawer off its tracks; it almost lands on her feet. A glossy 5 x 7 of Daniel at the helm of Paul Del Monte's boat. She picks up the load of albums, a whole life in her arms. The rabbi has just arrived to lead an evening service. She feels looked at by a smiling Daniel. She remembers the day they went out with Paul and Sylvia—so windy, the boat, heeling way over, scared her. Hard gusts rolled the bay black; she held on to Alyssa and stayed low.

She lifts up the albums to pass around. It's all supposed to be beautiful; a beautiful narrative. Already she's printed the most recent pictures and found a trove of Daniel's childhood photos to lay out on the coffee table. She hears coughing, straightening of chairs. Daniel's voice comes back. Not the words, just his voice over Alyssa's voice—Alyssa greeting latecomers.

Cheating a little, pulling aside the scarf covering the mirror of her vanity, she straightens her hair, tucks in her blouse with the scrap of black fabric pinned to the collar, and hurries in as the rabbi chants the *barekhu*, everyone standing, to begin the evening service in a house of mourning.

Jonah:

It's a bumpy flight. Jonah staggers to the rear of the plane, holding onto the seats, and, closing himself up in the bathroom, looks out at a layer of clouds just below. He's on his way home to Seattle after sitting *shiva* with Molly, Jeremy, Alyssa for two days. An odd thing. He feels his father enter his body—not a ghost, but folded-in, skin to skin. And his breath—his breath is his father's breath. He leans his hands on the washbasin and starts to heave hot breath and tears. If there's content to

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this grief, it's regret that they'd seen each other so little the past few years. Well, but that's what it's like, he thinks, his career, his father's career, one side of the country, the other. Still, it grieves him. *We used to be so close*, he thinks. He washes his face in cold water.

He remembers a line of poetry, "distance avails not, and place avails not," from Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." Paul Del Monte recited parts of the poem at the funeral; it was one his father loved. He takes the poem from his inside jacket pocket and unfolds it. At this moment Jonah feels his father's presence so intensely that he glances in the bathroom mirror, half expecting to see his father's face. "Hey, Dad?" he whispers.

As the plane rocks, over the loudspeaker the steward calls for passengers to return to their seats because of turbulence.

Jeremy:

Many years later, when Jeremy is working for the World Bank in Paris, his mother and stepfather come to pay a fall visit. It's become a tradition, these visits. Louise loves Jeremy's mother, and they have the opportunity of showing off Paris as if it were their own city. They also love it that Molly and Nathan take the children so he and Louise can spend a weekend in the country.

He's worried about his mother, her shortness of breath. She walks a block and has to stop. Arms akimbo, she sucks in air. He sees that Nathan is protective, making sure they walk slowly, taking cabs in the rain. He's a decent man, Nathan. Their romance they kept secret for a couple of years, and finally, when Molly retired, they married. Dad wouldn't mind, Jeremy thinks. He hopes his mom knows that. His dad was explicit about it that night after he collapsed at the table and Jonah and Jeremy helped him upstairs. Daniel felt better fast. Jeremy sat on the bed; they talked. "I want you . . . go to Israel, tickets, next summer. You go, you hear me?"

"Yes, Dad."

"You bring back some dirt . . . Holy Land, okay? A little. Spread on my grave, okay? Hey! I can talk like this . . . you . . . now . . . a big boy." He gestured for Jeremy to come close to him. "One more thing. Your mother. She'll marry, I think. I *want* that. You let her know."

During the week of sitting *shiva*, he mentioned it to Mom, but she waved it away and shut her eyes. Well, now she has somebody. Somebody nice, Dad. You'd really like him.

It brings him back to that night. Strange, Dad's collapse at the table, so out-of-the-blue and brief, and he recovered so fast. It comes back to Jeremy, closing his eyes, where they were sitting, what they were saying, and *snap*, just like that, he gets it. Why, the trickster! He knows what his father was doing. I was about to get on Alyssa's case, goof around with lettuce leaves. Dad knew I was going to act up. He faked it, faked a collapse to keep me from starting a fight and wrecking the dinner!

He thinks about his sister, living in San Francisco now. They have a phone date planned for the weekend. He can't wait to tell her.

Alyssa:

Alyssa is feeding her two-year-old, slapping the table and babbling *blh blh blh*, and Danny babbles back, mimicking but wilder. Then he starts and she copies. They echo each other while her husband Stan bolts down hot coffee and stuffs his bookbag before going off to teach.

"I wish you could have met him, my dad," she says. She fingers her earring, remembers she's wearing no earring—too dangerous with a toddler who might suddenly yank—and Stan nods. "We had such a nice time talking about him over the phone yesterday, Jeremy and I." Stan is trying to make sure he's got everything, but he nods so she'll know he hears her. She tells him, forgetting she's told him before, "At the end, you know, so sad, he just gave up." She's given that version to each of several boyfriends before she was married, to her best girlfriend in college.

"You've told me that, honey. Why? Why did he give up? Was he depressed?" Stan asks, hefting the heavy bookbag to his shoulder.

"Well, no, I wouldn't say so." She looks into a corner of the room, the ledge where she's put the shining samovar, as if he were standing there, her father, and she rethinks her story. "Stan? You know . . . maybe it wasn't giving up," she says. "Maybe Dad knew what was best for him."

Stan looks at the wall clock, puts down his bag, comes over to the table to kiss Danny and Alyssa.

"And maybe best for all of us. At the end he couldn't talk, but he could shake his head, and you knew he was there. Often he was smiling. God, I never thought of it that way. The final month was terribly sad, of course, but maybe it would have been worse."

When Stan goes off, she returns to echoing her son and being echoed by him, dancing the same dance, two in one, feeling the boy by enacting the life that's in him.

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Who Owns the Vietnam War?

Arthur Herman

In late August, an American President spoke forthrightly for the first time about what happened when the United States abandoned its commitments to two sovereign nations in Indochina, South Vietnam and Cambodia, and allowed them to be overrun by Communist forces. The President's remarks, which were intended to heighten public awareness of what might happen if we repeated the same mistake in Iraq, occupied barely three paragraphs in a 45-minute speech. Acknowledging that there is "a legitimate debate about how we got into the Vietnam war and how we left," Bush added that "Whatever your position is on that debate,"

> one unmistakable legacy of Vietnam is that the price of America's withdrawal was paid by millions of innocent citizens whose agonies would add to our own vocabulary new terms like "boat people," "reeducation camps," and "killing fields."

His words set off a firestorm among America's liberal elite. Outraged, Senator Joseph Biden accused the President of "playing the American people for fools." Everyone knows, Biden said, that "in Iraq, just as we did in Vietnam, we are clinging to a central government that does not and will not enjoy the support of the people" and is therefore doomed. The historian Robert Dallek declared that Bush's comparison "boggles the mind," and that the true comparison worked the other way around: even though "we dropped more bombs on Vietnam than we did in all of World War II in every theater, we couldn't work our will" to prevent North Vietnam's triumph over its southern neighbor—any more, presumably, than we can "work our will" in Iraq. Stanley Karnow, the author of *Vietnam: A History* (1983), one of the most widely read accounts of the war, asked sarcastically: "Does [Bush] think we should have *stayed* in Vietnam?" To Steven Simon of the Council on Foreign Relations, the postwar horrors that befell Vietnam and Cambodia occurred "because the United States left too late, not too early."

And so it went. Senator John Kerry, a Vietnam veteran, was particularly scathing. Already on record as denying there was any "bloodbath" in Vietnam after the war, he denounced the President's comparison as "irresponsible." America, he declared, "lost the war in Vietnam because our soldiers were trapped in a distant country we did not understand, supporting a government that lacked sufficient legitimacy with its people" and fighting a war for "politicians [who] knew our strategy would not work."

In short, Kerry and the others were scandalized

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not by Bush's drawing of an analogy between Iraq and Vietnam but by its divergence from *their* analogy. For if there is one foreign-policy issue that the American Left has prided itself on "owning" over the past three decades, it is the issue that goes under the heading, "the lessons of Vietnam."

Even before the last Marine helicopter left the roof of the U.S. embassy in Saigon in April 1975, a narrative had developed to explain the course and the ultimate meaning of the war, and ever since then it has served as a template for understanding and evaluating America's behavior in the world.

That template rests on four basic theses:

1. America's cold-war obsession with Communist totalitarianism led it to intervene in an internal struggle in which no conceivable vital interest was at stake. "We deluded ourselves into thinking that we were defending freedom," wrote the military analyst Andrew Bacevich (himself no leftist) after Bush's speech, when in fact "we had blundered into a civil war," a war in which our side, the Republic of South Vietnam, "proved to be a fiction."

2. On account of that initial mistake, we found ourselves confronting a powerful native insurgency in the form of the Vietcong (VC), an indigenous guerrilla force. In this unconventional conflict, for which the U.S. military was woefully unprepared, we soon resorted to drastic, even barbaric methods and then lied to the American public about them. As Jonathan Schell wrote in a famous 1967 essay in the *New Yorker*: "we are destroying, seemingly by inadvertence, the very country we are supposedly protecting." Or as Martin Luther King, Jr., put it: "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today [is] my own government."

3. The frustrations of fighting this losing battle wrecked the morale of American troops, leading to excessive drug use, assaults on unpopular officers with fragmentation grenades, atrocities against Vietnamese civilians as in the village of My Lai in 1968, and, in the aftermath, a generation of veterans physically and emotionally scarred for life. For the American soldier in Vietnam, Marilyn B. Young wrote in *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (1991), "the announced goals of the war—to repel an outside invader, to give the people of South Vietnam a chance to choose their own government—were daily contradicted by the soldier's sense that he was himself the invader." According to the writer Peter Marin, what made Vietnam different from other wars was the American soldiers' "direct confrontation . . . with their own culpability, their sense of their own capacity for error and excess" in an unjust and immoral conflict.

4. Despite intensive bombing, and despite Richard Nixon's 1970 invasion of Cambodia in an effort to wipe out enemy sanctuaries there, the American intervention was destined to fail. The final collapse, which put an end to the government of South Vietnam in 1975, led at last to the unification of the country and other beneficial effects. Rather than triggering a bloodbath or the fall of other Asian regimes to Communism, as Presidents Johnson and Nixon and other war supporters had predicted, "the strategic effect," in Bacevich's words, "proved to be limited." Once the Americans left, "the Vietnamese began getting their act together" and today enjoy peace and relative prosperity. In the judgment of Robert Dallek and others, whatever violence occurred in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge after we abandoned Vietnam was triggered by our earlier meddling in that country with Nixon's "secret" bombing and incursion.

STARTING with some of the very first dispatches from Saigon in 1962 by the news reporters David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan, through the formation of the antiwar movement in the late 1960's and the publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971, down to the final cutoff of funding for South Vietnam by Congress in 1975, and all the way until today, this construction has been a mainstay of the liberal Left, of the Democratic party, and of the mainstream media. It has been sustained and elaborated in films like *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, and *Born on the Fourth of July* and in television series like *China Beach*. In the minds of generations of Americans, it has taken on the aspect of unquestioned and unquestionable wisdom.

But is it accurate? By the late 1970's and early 1980's, in the wake of revelations about the Khmer Rouge massacres in Cambodia and the testimony of escapees from postwar Vietnam itself, critics like Guenter Lewy (*America in Vietnam*, 1978) and Norman Podhoretz (*Why We Were in Vietnam*, 1982) were undoing crucial elements of the standard account, especially its characterization of American motives in Indochina and its rosy portrayal of our adversaries. Lately, however, thanks to a growing body of evidence and careful work by scholars aided by first-hand accounts from former North Vietnamese and Vietcong participants, a much more comprehensive picture has begun to emerge, one that challenges the conventional wisdom from start to finish.

Among the new generation of historians of the Vietnam war, important debates and differences

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still remain—for example, over the efficacy of American tactics of counterinsurgency and pacification. But they overwhelmingly agree on one point: the old account is a myth, and no longer stands up to scrutiny. It is worthwhile reviewing some of the main findings of the new scholarship before returning to the question of their relevance, if any, to our present struggle in Iraq and to the President's warning on August 23.

VIETNAM may have been a "civil war" in the sense that it involved Vietnamese killing other Vietnamese. But it is far from the case that, as many have claimed, Ho Chi Minh, the founder of Vietnam's Indochinese Communist party, was primarily a nationalist who had successively fought Japanese occupiers (1941-45), French colonial rulers (1946-54), and finally the Americans (1965-75) in a determined effort to unify the two halves of his country and thus make it possible, in the words of one favorably disposed historian, for "the people of Indochina [to] govern themselves." Some have even asserted that, after World War II, the United States missed a great opportunity to support Ho in his fight against the French and for Vietnamese "self-determination."

The truth is otherwise. Even before he founded the party in 1930, Ho was a committed Stalinist and Comintern agent. During World War II, his party did little actual fighting against the Japanese, concentrating instead on eliminating its Vietnamese opponents. Once hostilities with France began in 1946, Ho's regime in North Vietnam survived with help from his ideological allies, especially the Soviet Union, until Mao Zedong's victory in his own war for control of China in 1949 finally opened the way for a full-scale Communist counterattack. Like Kim Il Sung's invasion of South Korea in June 1950, Ho's war against the French in Vietnam came with Stalin's backing and Mao's support, and was part of the same effort to create (in the testimony of the former Red Army journalists Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvortsky) "new opportunities for spreading Soviet Communism further into Asia."

Presidents Truman and Eisenhower understood the stakes in Vietnam only too well. Their goal in supporting the French against Ho and the Vietminh was to prevent a repetition of what was happening in Korea. By the time the conflict was winding down, the U.S. was supplying nearly 70 percent of the French effort—not enough to crush the Vietminh but enough to stop Ho from overrunning the southern half of the country. Without that help, the new republic in the south created by the 1954 Geneva Accords would have become subject to the same horrors that were about to engulf the north.

There, in 1954-55 alone, according to the French historian Jean-Louis Margolin (no admirer of American involvement in Vietnam), "the scale of violence was extraordinary."* At least 50,000 people were executed, a figure proportional with the number of Chinese butchered during Mao's agrarian "reforms" in China in 1949-50. Most victims were chosen virtually at random in order to terrorize the rest of North Vietnam's rural population. As in Maoist China, entire families were made to suffer. "The motto was similar to [that] in China," writes Margolin: "'Better ten innocent deaths than one enemy survivor.'" As many as 100,000 people were thrown into prison, and 95 percent of the cadres in the Vietminh were purged.

This reign of terror goes largely unmentioned in standard histories of the Vietnam war or by admiring biographers of Ho like David Halberstam. The same silence engulfs Hanoi's version of Mao's Great Leap Forward: a crash attempt, launched in October 1958, at collectivizing North Vietnam's fragile agricultural base that triggered a famine similar to the one devastating China during those same years. The number of Vietnamese who died is still unknown, but left behind was an impoverished police state not very different from today's North Korea, kept alive only by massive Soviet and Communist Chinese aid.

This was of no concern to Ho. Beginning in 1959, and for the remaining ten years of his life, his attention was focused on taking control of South Vietnam, a country that had so far eluded his grasp.

SOUTH VIETNAM was never the artificial American creation that critics claim. The political division of the country into northern and southern halves dates back at least to the 17th century, and was marked by sharp cultural and even linguistic differences. Indeed, the boundary between the two Vietnams set in the Geneva Accords roughly followed the south's line of fortifications constructed centuries earlier to fend off the north.

The south was also Vietnam's pluralist face, with a population in 1954 that included Christians, Buddhists (nearly one-quarter of the population), and ethnic Chinese, as well as 800,000 refugees from Ho's terror. These conflicting interests made gov-

* Margolin's essay on Vietnam appears in the definitive French volume, *The Black Book of Communism* (English edition 1999).

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ernance difficult: during its short and sad history, South Vietnam went through a series of unstable governments, especially after the fall of President Ngo Diem in November 1963. Nonetheless, over time this supposedly artificial and corrupt regime managed to turn South Vietnam into a country no less viable than South Korea, with an army similarly trained by U.S. advisers and then, starting in 1965, supported by American combat troops. By 1972, South Vietnam would have an army and local militia strong enough, with the aid only of American air power, to defend itself from full-scale attack by the North.

Ngo Diem was certainly no George Washington (as some admirers claimed), but neither was he the incompetent figure portrayed by the American press at the time and in current textbooks. The best and most recent account of the Diem years, by Mark Moyar,* documents his skill at balancing the demands of nationalists, traditionalists, and liberals and at convincing a peasant society to accept the unwelcome burden of fighting an insurgency funded, supplied, and even manned by the Communist North.

Diem's real failure was his inability to placate an American press determined to find fault with his leadership and American advisers like Colonel John Paul Vann who pressured Washington to drop its support for him. But Diem's removal by an American-supported coup in November 1963 only made things worse. As Moyar documents, before the coup the tide of war had been turning against the guerrillas. Yet by the time the American Foreign Service officer H.J. Kaplan arrived in Vietnam in January 1965, he was "shocked to discover that the Communists controlled most of the countryside."†

With year's end, however, the course of the war had again shifted with the arrival of American combat troops. By 1966, even after tens of thousands of North Vietnamese regulars had entered the South, the mood in Saigon was one of "cautious optimism." In the spring of 1967, General Earl Wheeler was able to predict a victory "if we apply pressure upon the enemy relentlessly in the North" as well as the South.

WHAT MADE this optimism possible was the U.S. military's overwhelming defeat of both Vietcong and North Vietnamese units in South Vietnam. This flies in the face of the second tenet of the Vietnam myth, namely, that after 1965 the United States found itself fighting an indigenous guerrilla army benefiting from superior tactics, enjoying popular support, and driven by a fervor that the weak and corrupt regime in Saigon could never hope to match. Thus, according to the historians G.M. Kahn and John W. Lewis, "The insurrection [was] southern-rooted; it arose at southern initiative in response to southern demands." Powerfully supporting this same view was Frances Fitzgerald in her Pulitzer-Prize winning *Fire in the Lake* (1972). Offering a benign portrait of the Vietcong and its political wing, the National Liberation Front (NLF), Fitzgerald predicted hopefully that this grassroots movement would one day "cleanse the lake of Vietnamese society" with "the narrow flame of revolution."

Scholarly research has debunked this picture, too. As early as 1975, North Vietnam's own Communist-party historian admitted that the Vietcong were "always simply a group emanating from" Hanoi. In 1964 the North stepped up its backing of this proxy force by sending entire combat units from its regular army across the border. It was this growing invasion that had finally forced President Johnson, against his own instincts, to commit American ground troops in 1965—a decision that the standard account presents as a final plunge into the Vietnamese "quagmire" but that in fact had the result of transforming the war from a counterinsurgency operation into a struggle among three conventional armies: the United States and the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam (ARVN) on one side, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) on the other.

From movies like *Platoon* (1986) and *Casualties of War* (1989), the cliché image of the war itself is of American GI's slogging through rice paddies in order to do battle with men and women wearing black pajamas and armed with World War II-vintage weapons. This may bear some resemblance to Vietnamese reality during the Kennedy years, but for later years Mel Gibson's *We Were Soldiers* (2002), based on the dramatic November 1965 fight in the Ia Drang Valley between a battalion of the U.S. 7th Cavalry and one of the NVA's best equipped and most powerful units, comes much closer.

The battle raged for four days, involving mortars, heavy machine guns, rocket launchers, artillery, and air strikes. At the end the North Vietnamese retreated in disarray, leaving nearly 2,000 dead, while American casualties were 79 killed and 121 wounded. Ia Drang was a major setback for North Vietnamese arms and a foretaste of what was

* *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965*, Cambridge, 542 pp., $32.00.

† "Remembering Vietnam," COMMENTARY, December 1987.

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to come. High-intensity conventional firefights in the mountainous terrain along South Vietnam's northern border, not the low-intensity insurgency in the Mekong Delta that dominated American headlines but caused less than 5 percent of the total American combat deaths, made up the real Vietnam war.

Tragically, the Johnson administration never accepted that it could win a war it was in fact winning. As H.R. McMaster shows in *Dereliction of Duty* (1997), the overarching theme of the Johnson years was not reckless war-mongering but its opposite: indecision followed by halfway measures, and a growing pessimism leading to more halfway measures. It was this that encouraged the North to extend its efforts in 1964, enabling its Vietcong auxiliary to regain lost ground. The same indecisiveness plagued the American approach to bombing, employed by Johnson and his Defense Secretary Robert McNamara largely for political rather than military objectives, i.e., in the vain hope of convincing the North to come to the bargaining table. Until 1968, in fact, Washington's carefully planned bombing campaigns barely had an impact on the course of the fighting.

On this point, later scholars like John Nagle, Andrew Krepinevich, and others have faulted the poor performance of the American military against the Vietcong. But they may overestimate the significance of the VC "insurgency," whose vacillating fortunes were almost entirely a function of the degree of North Vietnamese support. By June 1968, fully 70 percent of VC units in at least one province were actually North Vietnamese soldiers in disguise, and these northern invaders were as much foreigners as the Americans. "They wander around in the jungle," one Vietnamese interpreter told the Marines, "and can't do anything without our local people to act as guides." Far from being "fish swimming in the ocean of the people," as the propaganda cliché had it, the NVA forces were regular soldiers fighting conventional battles against a conventional foe who had them outclassed in nearly every category.

True, the North enjoyed two huge advantages. The first were its sanctuaries for regrouping and rearming in Cambodia and Laos. (These sanctuaries, ironically, had been set up with U.S. help according to agreements recognizing the two countries' "neutrality.") The second was the freedom to terrorize civilian populations into providing food and necessary cover for the North's operations. Yet even so, once Americans arrived in numbers, the Communists found themselves mauled in one battle after another. As time wore on, General Giap, the North's commander in chief, calculated that he needed a nine-to-one numerical advantage over the Americans in order to prevail in any battle. Eventually, the VC lost control even over the Mekong Delta, the original site of the alleged Vietnam "quagmire." The Tet offensive at the end of January 1968 would be the VC's last stand.

THE DECISION to launch that offensive was made in Hanoi. It was born of desperation, a mad gamble to seize the northern provinces of South Vietnam with conventional troops while triggering an uprising that would distract the Americans—and, some still hoped, revive the fading hopes of the Communists. The offensive itself began on January 30 and ended a little more than a month later when Marines crushed the last pockets of resistance in the northern city of Hue. It was a spectacular defeat both for the Vietcong, who failed to trigger their popular uprising, and for the North, which lost 20 percent of its forces in the South and suffered 33,000 men killed in action, all for no gain.

Today even the *New York Times* has had to concede that Tet was an overwhelming American victory. But, like many others, it still refuses to acknowledge the implications. Tet not only destroyed the Vietcong as an effective political and military force; together with the siege of Khe Sanh, it also crippled the NVA. Like the Somme or Verdun in World War I, these big battles exacted a price in "a lost generation" of North Vietnamese youth. Small wonder that in mid-1968 General Giap made the fateful decision to scale back NVA operations to hit-and-run raids while relying more heavily than ever on the sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia.

In the meantime, in the South, as Lewis Sorley notes in *A Better War* (1999), the Tet offensive "radically changed the outlook of South Vietnam's populace." Instead of provoking an uprising in favor of the Communists, its effect was "just the opposite—general mobilization in support of the government." By the end of 1969, over 70 percent of South Vietnam's population was rated as under government control, compared to 42 percent at the beginning of 1968. The new government of President Nguyen Van Thieu followed with a sweeping land-reform law that cut Vietnam's tenant-farmer population from 60 percent to 7 percent by 1973.

To be sure, all this made no impression on the American public. That was because the press had presented the Tet offensive as a stunning Communist success and a signal that there was no light at the

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end of the tunnel. The suddenness of the attack had caught not only the American military by surprise, but also the American media. After the war, one of their own, the *Washington Post*'s Saigon bureau chief Peter Braestrup, documented exactly how the major media proceeded to turn the reality of American victory into an image of American and South Vietnamese defeat.* Basing themselves on that image, Walter Cronkite and others clearly felt they now had definitive grounds for mistrusting their government's word and for concluding that, just as the antiwar movement had declared, victory in Vietnam was not and never had been a possibility.

Others went beyond this conclusion. In March 1969, the executive producer of ABC News told his Saigon bureau: "I think the time has come to shift our focus from the battlefield . . . to themes and stories under the general heading, 'We are on our way out of Vietnam.'" One of those "stories" would be the massacre at My Lai, which took place in the aftermath of Tet but became a news event only a year later. The steady coverage of isolated but sensational episodes like My Lai, deaths by "friendly fire," and the like had the effect of convincing many Americans that such extraordinary occurrences reflected the ordinary situation on the ground and were destroying their country's moral standing. Seizing the opportunity, a weakened Hanoi tried to turn it to its advantage. As Mark Woodruff writes in *Unheralded Victory: The Defeat of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese Army* (1999), Hanoi "increasingly shifted its [own] efforts toward the American media and the antiwar movement and soon sought American casualties as [its] main objective." Indirectly, then, the press's willful misreading of the meaning of Tet and its harping on the idea that "we are on our way out" would increase the cost of the war in American blood.

WHICH BRINGS us to the third tenet of the Vietnam myth—that our failures in vanquishing our unconventional foe pushed American soldiers over the brink, leading to the "fragging" of officers, drug use, and the kind of indiscriminate shooting of women and children later portrayed as common and widespread. Similarly, it became a truism that the ordeal of fighting an elusive enemy in the steaming jungles of Vietnam (unlike, presumably, the ordeal of fighting a similarly elusive enemy in the steaming jungles of Guadalcanal or Guam during World War II) left veterans uniquely traumatized, psychological time bombs set to go off under the pressure of later "flashbacks" to their Vietnam experience. Woodruff points to the popular 70's television series *Kojak*, in which, after any particularly gruesome homicide, the police lieutenant would routinely order "that all Vietnam vets be brought in for questioning."

Guenter Lewy was one of the first to investigate the claim that atrocities like My Lai were routine. He found no grounds for it. On the contrary, what made My Lai so noteworthy—an estimated 180-200 civilians were killed by members of an Army "search and destroy" task force under the impression that the villagers were actively supporting the enemy—and caused the Army to put its perpetrators on trial, was precisely that it was both unusual and in violation of military directives. Even so harsh a critic of the war as the former Pentagon official Daniel Ellsberg was emphatic on this point: "My Lai was beyond the bounds of permissible behavior . . . virtually every soldier in Vietnam [knew] it was wrong."

Other, later assertions about similar mass shootings, or indiscriminate killings on orders from higher-ups, also fall apart under scrutiny. At the meeting of Vietnam Veterans Against the War held in Detroit in early 1971, the so-called Winter Soldier conference, John Kerry and others claimed to have witnessed grisly tortures, villages burned to the ground, gang rapes of women, ears cut off, and other horrors. When an outraged Congress demanded an inquiry, however, the claims evaporated. Many so-called eyewitnesses refused to testify, even after being promised that they would never be questioned about atrocities they personally had witnessed or committed. Several turned out never to have been in Vietnam at all. In the end, no substantive charges ever emerged from the Winter Soldier conference.

Another notorious case was that of Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Herbert, who claimed he had been dismissed from the army for refusing to cover up war crimes. Herbert received lavish coverage in the *New York Times*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* and three appearances on the *Dick Cavett Show* before his story was finally exposed as fraudulent. Yet an insatiable appetite for sensational charges continued to draw bizarre characters into the limelight. They included Kenneth B. Osborn, who testified in 1973 to "atrocities" committed by members of the CIA's Phoenix pacification program but who had never served in the Phoenix program or met anyone connected with it, and never provided any specific information to support his charges; former Army Lieutenant Francis Reitemeyer, who claimed that

* *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet in Vietnam and Washington* (1977).

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he had been given a "kill quota of 50 VC per month" but had never even served in Vietnam; and the seven patients at a veterans' hospital in Nevada, allegedly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of service in Vietnam, one of whose stories was so harrowing that he had been hired as a counselor at the local Veterans' Center but none of whom had actually been there. Tom Harkin of Iowa, who may have served in Vietnam but not in the role of combat pilot as he claimed, even made it to the United States Senate.

Genuine veterans of Vietnam, by contrast, were hardly broken men and women. The rate of murderous attacks or "fragging" of unpopular officers was lower in American ranks than among Australian troops in Vietnam, and the rate of drug use was no higher than among American military personnel serving in Germany. Psychiatric casualties in Vietnam (12 per 1,000) were lower than in the Korean war (37 per 1,000) or in World War II, even though the Vietnam veteran spent more time in combat than his predecessor in that latter conflict. In 1980, according to a Veterans Administration survey, *90 percent* of Vietnam vets with "heavy combat exposure" said they were proud to have served their country, and 69 percent said their service had been a positive experience. A 1986 *Washington Post*/ABC poll reported that Vietnam veterans were more likely than their peers in the general population to have a college education, own their own home, and hold a high-income job. Divorce and suicide rates were no higher among veterans than among non-veterans.

Certainly, atrocities took place in Vietnam, as they do in all wars and under all conditions. Yet out of 2.59 million American soldiers and Marines who served in Vietnam, a grand total of 201 Army personnel and 77 Marines were tried and convicted of serious crimes against Vietnamese civilians. Of these, 95 soldiers and 27 Marines were convicted of unjustifiable homicide, but in fully 25 percent of those cases the deaths occurred in the midst of combat operations. By contrast with such American atrocities, which were random and rare, Vietcong atrocities, like the murder of entire families in order to terrorize villages into submission, were systematic and a matter of deliberate policy. Wholesale butchery of the kind perpetrated in Hue in 1968 was repeated on a smaller scale many times in the Vietnamese countryside. But American reporters were simply not interested in covering this, preferring instead to focus on American misdeeds, even when they were fabricated.

The reporter Peter Arnett, a strident critic of the war, had to admit afterward that he had never seen an American soldier kill or even abuse a Vietnamese civilian. "They didn't even think of it. Every unit I was with, [the GI's] went out of their way to be kind and decent with the people." Yet, in 1998, a quarter-century later, the same Arnett was still capable of running a CNN program about American use of nerve gas in Vietnam, even though he and everyone else involved in the story must have guessed that the allegations were untrue.

In 1969, as Richard Nixon arrived in the White House, South Vietnam was settling into a period of relative peace and calm. General Creighton Abrams had taken over as Westmoreland's successor, and, as documented by Phillip B. Davidson in *Vietnam at War* (1988), North Vietnam's heavy casualties in Tet had compelled Hanoi to reduce the size of its operations in the South. With the decline in American and South Vietnamese casualties, Abrams shifted attention to pacification tactics while also providing more up-to-date material support for his South Vietnamese allies, including tanks and helicopters.

But the war was still going in Vietnam's highlands and along its borders, and the American public was increasingly impatient to see it end. Support for our continued presence had dipped below 50 percent in February 1968, in the midst of Tet. A month later, disapproval of America's handling of the war rose to 63 percent. The tide of public opinion forced President Johnson to drop out of the presidential race and call for peace talks with Hanoi, while unilaterally halting the bombing campaign north of the 20th parallel (the most effective air campaign of the war thus far). Abrams had no illusions about the amount of time he had to secure South Vietnam, but he believed that in Nixon he finally had a White House willing to bring the war to the enemy.

Nixon had been elected to end the war, not to win it, and his declared priority was to begin the withdrawal of American forces. Yet, paradoxically, it was success on the battlefield in 1969-70 that allowed him to draw down troop numbers and thus simultaneously respond to a public convinced that the war was not a success but a failure. Nevertheless, the cuts themselves inevitably endangered the stability that had permitted them to be made in the first place.

The next years were rife with such contradictions. At first, Nixon tried the same strategies that Johnson had hoped would entice North Vietnam to the bargaining table, with the same miserable re-

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sults. Then, for the first time in the war, he swung over to an offensive strategy, closing down the NVA's sanctuaries along Vietnam's 800-mile border with Laos and Cambodia, across which Communist soldiers had been allowed to attack at will, and thereby correcting America's most glaring military problem.

According to the Vietnam myth, Nixon's "incursion" into Cambodia in 1970, followed by Operation Lam Son 719 into Laos, was not only illegal and unconstitutional but had the effect of widening the war and destabilizing the region. In fact, it was the existence of the Communist sanctuaries that had destabilized the region, and deeply worried American allies in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Nixon's incursion was also the U.S. Army's first major joint operation with the South Vietnamese. More than 50,000 ARVN troops proved their effectiveness at waging the kind of war they would need to fight to keep their country free: flying their own helicopters, operating their own heavy artillery and tanks, even conducting their own air strikes. Cambodia was proof that Vietnamization could work.

Meanwhile, Nixon also brought the war north. He ordered the mining of Haiphong harbor, the main unloading depot for Russian and Chinese supplies, and launched a steady bombing campaign that finally wrecked the North's capacity to wage battle. Robert Dallek's assertion that we failed to win a war in which we "dropped more bombs than in World War II" is thus both misleading and irrelevant. In fact, the majority of tonnage of bombs dropped during the war was in the South, not the North, was in support of tactical operations, and, thanks to the ability to bomb in far tighter clusters than during the Korean war, resulted in far less collateral damage. It was Vietnam, not the Gulf war of 1991, that marked, in 1968, the first use of so-called "smart," laser-guided weapons.

The American media completely missed these important developments, too. More than that: to quote Lewis Sorley, "in these later years the press simply missed the war." It missed the fact that the siege of Khe Sanh had been a major American victory, mistakenly representing it as a repetition of France's 1954 debacle at Dien Bien Phu. Although it lavishly covered the reports of gullible visitors to Hanoi like Mary McCarthy, Jane Fonda, and Harrison Salisbury, all of whom described a North heroically struggling against Washington's campaign to "bomb them back into the Stone Age," it missed the fact that the collateral damage caused by American bombing, including the so-called Christmas bombing in 1972, was actually very limited. When Stanley Karnow visited Hanoi in 1981, expecting to find large sections of the city leveled, he was astonished to report that "Hanoi and Haiphong are almost completely unscathed, and the surrounding countryside appears to have been barely touched."

Nixon's real triumph came on the diplomatic front, when he persuaded both China and Russia to shut off the spigot of support for Hanoi. This loss, combined with the effectiveness of American bombing and the NVA's disastrous "Easter" offensive against the South in 1972, which cost the famous General Giap his job, finally forced Hanoi to sign the peace accords waiting for them in Paris and to recognize the Republic of South Vietnam. Nixon was now free to withdraw the last remaining U.S. troops—a withdrawal, according to the Vietnam myth, supposedly taking place under the looming shadow of defeat.

As we have seen, however, the withdrawal had actually been under way since 1969; by August 1972, there were no more U.S. combat forces left in Vietnam and a year later there were no U.S. military personnel at all. The reason, in Sorley's words, was that by then "the South Vietnamese countryside had been widely pacified, so much so that the term 'pacification' was no longer even used." Once again, this was not the picture presented by the media, to Congress, or to the American public.

THE PARIS Peace Accords left several hostages to fortune. The most important was the continued presence of more than 160,000 NVA troops in the South who resumed fighting almost as soon as the accords were signed. Although Henry Kissinger recommended renewed bombing along the Laos corridor, Nixon hesitated and then did nothing. With the departure of the last American troops, he had lost his political leverage with Congress and his military leverage in Vietnam. He and Kissinger now had to sit on the sidelines and watch as the NVA, in flagrant violation of the agreement signed in Paris, steadily rebuilt its strength with the help of Russia and China, and the South felt the noose tighten once again.

After Nixon's highly successful Cambodia incursion in 1970, the Democratic Congress had passed the Cooper-Church amendment to ensure that something like this would never happen again. Now, to add to his troubles, Nixon's presidency had begun to collapse with the Watergate scandals. Democrats sought to complete the political rout by sabotaging what was left of his Vietnam policy.

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When a rebuilt and re-equipped NVA launched a massive invasion across the DMZ in 1975, there was no possibility that Congress would redeem the original pledges of support for South Vietnam, even if the country's survival was at stake. A weakened caretaker President, Gerald Ford, bowed to what seemed to him inevitable.

The British counterinsurgency expert Robert Thompson, who visited South Vietnam in 1974, wrote admiringly of "the resilience of the Vietnamese, their courage, stamina, and stoicism. . . . They surmounted national and personal crises that would have crushed most peoples." But to many Vietnamese, it must have seemed pointless to fight on if their patron and ally was going to leave them in the lurch. As Kissinger confessed to President Thieu, "It is a fact that in the United States all the press, the media, and the intellectuals have a vested interest in [your] defeat."

On April 23, 1975, even as the battered ARVN was fighting to the last round against a vastly superior NVA force at Xuan Loc, Ford proclaimed that "America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned." To most South Vietnamese, this signaled the doom of their country.

AND NOT their country alone. The final conquest of South Vietnam by North Vietnam in April 1975 signaled the start of a domino-like process that antiwar critics had always ridiculed as fantasy. By the end of the decade, the much-derided "domino theory" had become fact.

The first to fall to Communist expansionism was of course South Vietnam itself. Its army had been the fourth largest in the world, and its navy the fifth largest; as a result of its collapse, masses of U.S.-made military equipment fell into Communist hands. The former Navy and Air Force base at Cam Ranh Bay became home to a Soviet submarine and surface-fleet presence—the largest such base outside the Soviet Union. A similar fate befell Vietnam's nearest neighbors. The cessation of U.S. aid to the pro-American government in Cambodia delivered that country into the hands of the NVA's ally, the Khmer Rouge, while Laos gave up any pretense at neutrality and became totally dominated by the Communist Pathet Lao.

Those who still cling to the Vietnam myth maintain that the falling dominos stopped there, since other Southeast Asian nations like Thailand and Malaysia did *not* succumb to Communist domination. True; but the domino effect was not limited to Asia alone. As the political scientist Michael Katz has pointed out, after Vietnam it was "politically impossible for the U.S. government to undertake large-scale military intervention anywhere in the third world," a fact of which Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries took ample advantage. Even during the war, new pro-Soviet regimes had emerged in the Congo (1968), Benin (1972), and Ethiopia and Guinea Bissau (1974). At war's end and thereafter, the list grew to include, in 1975, Madagascar, Cape Verde, Mozambique, and Angola, then Afghanistan (1978) and Grenada and Nicaragua (1979). The fall of the shah of Iran and the establishment of the Ayatollah Khomeini's radical Islamic republic can similarly be seen as a result of America's abandonment of Vietnam—and as itself the first domino in a second great revolutionary wave with which we are still trying to come to grips.

As for the people living in the affected countries, the result was a humanitarian disaster. The claim that there was no "bloodbath" in South Vietnam is true only by comparison with what happened to its neighbor Cambodia. On top of the more than 275,000 South Vietnamese who died fighting in the country's armed forces, at least 65,000 were murdered or shot after "liberation"—the equivalent of three-quarters of a million people in today's United States. According to the scholar D.R. Sar Desai, the Communist regime forcibly relocated or sent to "reeducation camps" somewhere between one-third to one-half of South Vietnam's population; perhaps as many as 250,000 died of disease, starvation, or overwork, and the last inmates were not released until 1986. Ironically, the victims included many former members of the National Liberation Front and Vietcong, who realized too late that they had been puppets of the North all along. Another million or so Vietnamese, most of them ethnic Chinese, fled by sea from the new regime; an unknown number died or were lost at sea.

It was of course in Cambodia that the most notorious of post-Vietnam mass murders took place. This is not the place to recite all the horrors associated with the reign of terror of the Khmer Rouge. From the perspective of the Vietnam myth, what is significant is how the bloody role of the Khmer Rouge was at first denied and then twisted so that blame for their brutality could be placed firmly on the United States, in particular on those who had fought to avoid a bloodbath in the first place.

Far from an independent force, the Khmer Rouge had been founded in 1951 as an integral component of Ho Chi Minh's Indochinese Communist party. After 1970, Communist North Viet-

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nam steadily armed and trained the Khmer Rouge to do battle against the pro-American government in Phnom Penh. At the time, antiwar activists in the United States were perfectly aware of this, and wholly approved: here was the Vietcong's Cambodian twin, another group of Asian revolutionaries struggling to liberate their country from the yoke of neo-colonialism.

Five years later, when the horrific revelations about the Cambodian killing fields began to leak out, the line changed. In the argument best articulated by the British journalist William Shawcross in *Sideshow* (1979), Nixon and Kissinger's "secret" bombing campaigns in Cambodia had so destabilized the country and wrecked its cultural fabric as to push the Khmer Rouge in an increasingly radical and vicious direction. Noam Chomsky and his coauthor Edward Herman would go so far as to claim that the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge were "a direct and understandable response to the still more concentrated and extreme savagery of a U.S. assault that may in part have been designed to evoke this very response."

As Shawcross, to his credit, would later admit, none of this bears scrutiny. Nixon's bombing campaign was never "secret" at all. The Cambodian government had itself approved and encouraged the campaign, hoping it would drive the hated Vietnamese out of the country once and for all. As for provoking the otherwise pacifically inclined Khmer Rouge, Laos was more heavily bombed than Cambodia during the war, and South Vietnam more than both, yet neither country produced a revolutionary insurgency as violent as the killers who inherited Phnom Penh.

The ideology of the Khmer Rouge, writes Jean-Louis Margolin, was "part of the great tradition of Leninism found in the successive figures of Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Ho Chi Minh," and the proportion of the Cambodian population they killed "at the very least one in seven, and more likely one in five or four, is enough to obliterate the oft-heard argument that the violence of the Khmer Rouge . . . was only the reaction of a people driven mad by the original sin of American bombing." To the contrary, one would be justified in concluding (in the words of the American political journalist Michael Lind) that "if any Americans deserve a share of the blame for the Khmer Rouge massacres and famines, it is antiwar members of Congress . . . who sought to hasten a Khmer Rouge victory by denying U.S. military aid and air support for America's Cambodian allies."

IN IDENTIFYING the Khmer Rouge massacres as "a direct and understandable response to the still more concentrated and extreme savagery of a U.S. assault that may in part have been designed to evoke this very response," Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman typified a more widespread moral deadening that had slowly spread like a poison across the American Left during and after the war, and that permeates casual discourse to this day. The poison resulted from the exercise of building and sustaining an entirely fictionalized version of reality in Vietnam, and from steadfastly refusing to weigh the actions of America's enemies in the same ethical balance as the actions of America itself.

Above all, antiwar activists and critics of American policy in the media denied their *own* moral responsibility for what happened in Vietnam and Indochina once the policy they themselves had vociferously advocated—namely, withdrawal and disengagement—was carried out. When, four years after the fall of Saigon, Joan Baez, Richard John Neuhaus, and other former antiwar activists tried to draw attention to the plight of Vietnam's boat people and the brutal tyranny that had been established in that country, their former comrades, led by celebrities like Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda, denounced them as "stooges" and CIA agents. "Even if the [North] Vietnamese had chosen the course of mass executions and plunder," one of these former comrades stated in a letter, "it would have been our own strategies of terror and brutality that drove them to it."

This collapse of ethical and intellectual integrity would have consequences far beyond Vietnam. In the decades to come, the Vietnam myth would justify the Left's instinctual opposition to America's efforts to contain Communist aggression in Latin America in the 1980's, its characterization of the 1991 Gulf war as a campaign of "blood for oil," and its denunciations of our interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11. The need to prop up the same myth in the face of a contradictory reality would fuel the "paranoid style" of leftist conspiracy-mongering in films like Oliver Stone's *JFK*, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 911*, and most recently and blatantly *Loose Change*, which argues that the Twin Towers were brought down by agents of the Bush administration. And, as President Bush discovered last August, it remains potent enough to trigger the most irrational and rhetorically violent responses when anyone dares challenge its proprietary construction of what the Vietnam war was

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in fact all about, and what are its lessons.

Historical analogies are never entirely accurate. They may not even be useful. But it remains true that our present and future actions are always based, to some extent, on our evaluation of past experience. Generals are often accused of fighting the last war. This is something that, when it comes to Vietnam, liberals and leftists have been doing for more than three decades, by refusing to confront (in words Peter Marin once flung in the face of American authorities) "their own culpability" and "their own capacity for error and excess." Whatever the differences or similarities between Vietnam and Iraq, or between Vietnam and our global war with Islamic radicalism, the real analogy between then and now may lie in this tenacious refusal of self-examination by the liberal Left—especially when the facts utterly contravene its reflexive indictment of the motives, purposes, and actions of the American government.

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Defending Human Dignity

Leon R. Kass

In contrast to continental Europe, human dignity has never been a powerful idea in American public discourse. We tend instead to be devoted to the language of rights and the pursuit of equality. For the egalitarians among us, the very idea of "dignity" smacks too much of aristocracy, and for secularists and libertarians too much of religion. Moreover, it seems to be too vague and private a matter to be the basis for public policy.

Yet we Americans actually care a great deal about human dignity, even if the term does not come easily to our lips. In times past, our successful battles against slavery, sweatshops, and segregation, although fought in the name of civil rights, were at bottom campaigns for treating human beings as they deserve to be treated solely because of their humanity. Likewise, our taboos against incest, bestiality, and cannibalism, as well as our condemnations of prostitution, drug addiction, and self-mutilation—all these, having little to do with defending liberty or equality, seek to uphold human dignity against (voluntary) acts of *self*-degradation.

Today, human dignity is of paramount importance in nearly every arena of bioethical concern: clinical medicine; research using human subjects; uses of novel biotechnologies "beyond therapy," particularly for so-called enhancement purposes; and activities aimed at altering and transcending human nature. Indeed, as we become more and more immersed in a world of biotechnology, we increasingly sense that we neglect human dignity at our peril, not least in light of our gathering powers to alter human bodies and minds in ways that affect our very humanity.

Because ethical concerns differ in the various domains of bioethics, each domain tends to emphasize a particular aspect of human dignity. Thus, in clinical medicine, a primary focus is on the need to respect the equal worth of each patient at every stage of life—regardless of race, class, or gender, condition of body and mind, severity of illness, nearness to death, or ability to pay. Every patient deserves equal respect in speech and deed and equal consideration in selecting an appropriate treatment. No life is to be deemed worthier than another, and under no circumstances should we look upon a fellow human being as if he had a "life unworthy of life" and deserved to be made dead. The ground of these opinions, and of the respect for human dignity they betoken, lies not in the patient's autonomy or any other personal qualities but rather in his very being and vitality.

Regarding research with human subjects, the major ethical issues concern not only safeguarding the subject's life and health but also respecting his humanity, even as this will generally be overlooked

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in the research protocol. Through the soliciting of their voluntary informed consent, the human subjects are treated also as knowing and willing co-partners in the research enterprise.

In clinical medicine and research on human subjects, then, appeals to human dignity function explicitly as bulwarks against abuse: patients should not be reduced to "thing-hood" or treated as mere bodies; research subjects should not be utilized as mere means or treated only as experimental animals. This "negative" function of the concept of human dignity helps to restrain the strong in their dealings with the weak.

BUT A MORE robust notion of human dignity is needed when we turn to the moral challenges raised by new biotechnological powers and the novel purposes to which they are being put, and to concerns prompted not by what others may do to us but by what we may choose to do to ourselves. After all, the powers of biotechnology to alter body and mind are attractive not only to the sick and suffering but to everyone who desires to look younger, perform better, feel happier, or become more "perfect."

We have already entered the age of biotechnical enhancement: growth hormone to make children taller; pre-implantation genetic screening to facilitate eugenic choice; Ritalin to control behavior or boost performance on exams; Prozac and other drugs to brighten moods and alter temperaments—not to mention Botox, Viagra, and anabolic steroids. Looking ahead, we can see other invitations already on the horizon: drugs to erase painful or shameful memories or to simulate falling in love. Genes to increase the size and strength of muscles. Nano-mechanical implants to enhance sensation or motor skills. Techniques to slow biological aging and increase the maximum human lifespan.

Thanks to these and other innovations, venerable human desires—for better children, superior performance, ageless bodies, and happy souls—may increasingly be satisfied with the aid of biotechnology. A new field of "trans-humanist" science is rallying thought and research for the wholesale redesign of human nature, employing genetic and neurological engineering and man-machine hybrids, en route to what has been blithely called a "post-human future."

Neither the familiar principles of contemporary bioethics—respect for persons, beneficence, and justice—nor our habitual concerns for safety, efficacy, autonomy, and equal access will enable us to gauge the true promise and peril of the biotechnology revolution. Our hopes for self-improvement and our disquiet about a "post-human" future are much more profound. At stake are the kind of human being and the sort of society we will be creating in the coming age.

BROADLY speaking, and despite the differing emphases among the diverse fields of medical practice, discussions of human dignity in bioethical matters have two main foci: concern for the dignity of life around the edges (the "life and death" issues) and concern for the dignity of life in its fullness and flourishing (the "good life" or the "dehumanization" issues). If one believes that the greatest threat comes in the form of death and destruction—say, in the practices of euthanasia and assisted suicide, embryo research, or even just denial of treatment to the less than fully fit—then one will be primarily concerned to uphold the equal dignity of every still-living human being, regardless of condition. If, by contrast, one thinks that the greatest danger comes not from killing the creature made in God's image but from self-deifying efforts to redesign him after our own fantasies, or even only from self-abasing practices reflecting shrunken views of human well-being, then one will be primarily concerned to uphold the full dignity of human excellence and rich human flourishing.

These two aspects of human dignity—the basic dignity of human *being*, and the full dignity of being flourishingly *human*—do not always have the same defenders, especially when the two seem to be at odds. Indeed, defenders of one sometimes ignore the claims made on behalf of the other. Thus, certain pro-lifers appear to care little whether babies are cloned or "born" in bottles, so long as no embryo dies in the process; others insist that life must be sustained come what may, even if it means being complicit in prolonging the degradation or misery of loved ones. Conversely, certain advocates of "death with dignity" appear to care little whether the weak and unwanted are deemed unworthy of life and swept off the stage, so long as they get to control how their *own* life ends; and patrons of excellence through biotechnological enhancement often have little patience with the need to care for those whose days of excellence are long gone. Meanwhile, the trans-humanist researchers who dream of post-human supermen care not a fig either for the dignity of human being *or* for the dignity of being human; they esteem not at all the dignity of us ordinary mortals, let alone those of us who are even less than merely ordinary.

Yet there is no reason why friends of human dig-

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nity cannot be defenders of all aspects at once, both the dignity of "the low" and the dignity of "the high." In fact, when properly understood, the two notions are much more intertwined than they are opposed. In order to see why, we need to examine each more closely, beginning with the dignity of human flourishing and living well—of being *human*.

Among the many moving songs from the American Civil War, one in particular always gives me gooseflesh: the "First Arkansas Marching Song," written for and sung (to the tune of "John Brown's Body") by a regiment made up entirely of ex-slaves fighting on the side of the Union:

> Oh we're the bully soldiers of the
> First of Arkansas,
> We are fighting for the Union, we are
> fighting for the law;
> We can hit a Rebel further than a white
> man ever saw,
> As we go marching on.
>
> (Chorus: Glory, glory, hallelujah, etc.)
>
> We are done with hoeing cotton, we are
> done with hoeing corn,
> We are colored Yankee soldiers, now, as
> sure as you are born;
> When the masters hear us yelling, they
> will think its Gabriel's horn,
> As we go marching on.
>
> . . . .
>
> Then fall in, colored brethren, you'd
> better do it soon,
> Can't you hear the drums a-beating the
> Yankee Doodle tune;
> We are with you now this morning, we'll
> be far away at noon,
> As we go marching on.

Debased ex-slaves, only recently hoeing cotton and corn for their masters, have transformed themselves into brave soldiers "fighting for the Union . . . fighting for the law." Although formally emancipated by Lincoln's proclamation months earlier, they have been truly lifted up not by another's largesse but by their own power and choice. They celebrate here their new estate, singing out their dignity and beckoning others to join the cause.

The heart is stirred by this simple display of noble humanity, not least because it fully refutes the dehumanizing conclusions some may have drawn from the marchers' prior servitude and submissiveness, namely, that anyone who accepts a life in slavery must have a slavish soul. I am particularly moved by their dedication to a cause higher than their own advantage. And my imagination thrills to the picture of their marching through Southern towns and past slave-holding plantations, summoning their brethren to affirm their own dignity by putting their lives similarly in the service of freedom and union.

Opposite to this example of dignity triumphing over degradation is the self-inflicted dehumanization of Herr Professor Immanuel Rath in the classic German movie, *The Blue Angel* (1930). A strict, upright *gymnasium* teacher, Professor Rath goes to the local night club to reprimand his wayward students who have been attracted there by the siren singer, Lola Lola, and to scold her for corrupting the young. But on entering into her presence, Rath is smitten by Lola's charms, and he returns the next night filled with desires of his own. When he gallantly "defends her honor" against a brutish sea captain seeking sexual favors, Lola, touched by his chivalry, invites him to spend the night.

Exposed in school the next morning by his students, the honorable professor declares his intention to marry Lola Lola, for which decision he is promptly dismissed from his position. Lola, after laughing uproariously at his proposal, unaccountably accepts him; yet at the wedding feast, in front of all the guests, Rath is made to cock-a-doodle-do like a rooster in love. The married professor now joins the traveling show, first as Lola's servant, later as a performing clown.

Eventually, when the traveling entertainers return to his hometown, Professor Rath is made co-star of the vaudeville show. Lola, with a recently acquired new lover at her side, again forces Rath to play a (now-cuckolded) crowing rooster while eggs are cracked upon his skull before a full house of roaring spectators, including his former students and neighbors. It is a scene of human abasement that is unbearable to watch.

What human goods and evils are at issue in these two vignettes? Not liberty or equality or health or safety or justice, but primarily the gain or loss of worthy humanity—in short, the display or the liquidation of human dignity. In the first case, degraded human beings knowingly assert their humanity and their manhood; anyone not humanly stunted will admire and applaud their nobility, courage, and devotion to a righteous purpose higher than themselves. In the second case, an upright and proper man of learning loses, first, his wits and his profession to his infatuation and, finally, every shred of dignified humanity as he

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shrinks to impersonate an inarticulate barnyard animal; notwithstanding that he has brought this on himself, anyone not humanly stunted will shudder at his utter degradation.

With these examples before us, let me try to specify what I mean by the dignity of human flourishing—of being actively *human*. Both historically and linguistically, "dignity" has always implied something elevated, something deserving of respect. The central notion, etymologically, in English as in the Latin root *dignitas*, is worthiness, elevation, honor, nobility—in brief, excellence or virtue. In all its meanings it has been a term of distinction; dignity is not something that, like a nose or a navel, is to be expected or found in every human being. Even in democratic times, as the soldiers of the First of Arkansas make clear, "dignity" still conveys the active display of what is humanly best.

But *which* intrinsic excellences or "elevations" are at the heart of human dignity and give their bearers special standing? In the view of the ancient Greek poets, the true or full human being is the hero, who draws honor and prizes by displaying his worthiness in noble and glorious deeds. Supreme is the virtue of courage: the willingness to face death in battle, armed only with your own prowess, going forth against an equally worthy opponent—think Achilles against Hector—who, like you, seeks victory not only over his adversary but, as it were, over death itself. Following the Socratic turn in the history of Greek thought, such heroic excellence was supplanted by the virtue of wisdom; the new hero is not the glorious warrior but the man singularly devoted to wisdom, living close to death not on the field of battle but in a single-minded quest for knowledge eternal.

Attractive though these candidates are, however—we can still read about Achilles and Socrates with admiration—the Greek exemplars are of little practical use in democratic times, and especially when it comes to bioethical matters. The dehumanization evident in Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932) is not primarily the lack of glorious warriors or outstanding philosophers (or artists or scientists or statesmen). The basic problem is the absence of kinds of human dignity more abundantly found and universally shared.

In Western philosophy, the most high-minded attempt to supply a teaching of universal human dignity belongs to Kant, with his doctrine of respect for *persons*. For Kant, all persons or rational beings deserve respect, not because of some realized excellence of achievement but by dint of their participation in morality and their ability to live under the moral law. Through this concept of "personhood," Kant sought to find a place for human freedom and dignity in the face of a Newtonian world view that reduced even the human being to a matter of physics.

But Kant's respect for persons is largely formal, abstracted from how they actually exercise their freedom of will. If universal human dignity is grounded in having a moral life, greater dignity would seem to attach to having a *good* moral life—that is, on choosing well and on choosing rightly. Is there not more dignity in the courageous than in the cowardly, in the moderate than in the self-indulgent, in the righteous than in the wicked, in the honest man than in the liar?

And there is a deeper difficulty with the Kantian dignity of "personhood." It is finally inadequate not because it is undemocratic or too demanding but because it is, in an important respect, inhuman. In setting up a concept of "personhood" in opposition to nature and to the body, it fails to do justice to the concrete reality and particularity of our embodied lives: lives of begetting and belonging no less than of willing and thinking, lives lived always locally, corporeally, and in a unique trajectory from zygote in the womb to body in the coffin. Not all of human dignity consists in reason or freedom.

The Kantian dignity of rational choice pays no respect at all to the dignity we have through our natural desires and passions, natural origins and attachments, sentiments and repugnances, loves and longings. It pays no respect, in short, to what Tolstoy called "real life," life as ordinarily and concretely lived.

The dignity of being human is perfectly at home in ordinary life, as it is at home in democratic times. Courage, moderation, generosity, righteousness, and the other human virtues are not solely confined to the few. Many of us strive for them, with partial success, and still more of us do ourselves honor in admiring persons nobler and finer than ourselves. We frequently give even wayward neighbors the benefit of the doubt, and we strongly believe in the possibility of a second chance. No one ever knows for sure when a person hitherto seemingly weak of character will rise to the occasion, actualizing an ever-present potential for worthy conduct. No one knows when, as with the ex-slaves of the First of Arkansas, human dignity will summon itself and shine forth brightly. With suitable models, proper rearing, and adequate encouragement—or even just the fitting opportunity—

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many of us can be and can act in accord with our higher natures.

In truth, if we know how to look, we can find evidence of human dignity all around us, in the valiant efforts ordinary people make to meet necessity, to combat adversity and disappointment, to provide for their children, to care for their parents, to help their neighbors, to serve their country. Life provides numerous hard occasions that call for endurance and equanimity, generosity and kindness, courage and self-command. Adversity sometimes brings out the best in us, and often shows best what we are made of. Even confronting our own death provides a chance for the exercise of admirable humanity, for the small and the great alike.

Beyond the dignity of virtue and endurance, there is also the simple but deep dignity of human activity—sewing a dress, throwing a pot, building a fire, cooking a meal, dressing a wound, singing a song, or offering a blessing in gratitude. There is the simple but deep dignity of intimate human relations—bathing a child, receiving a guest, embracing a friend, kissing one's bride, consoling the bereaved, dancing a dance, or raising a glass in gladness. And there is the simple but deep dignity of certain ennobling human passions—hope, wonder, trust, love, sympathy, thankfulness, awe, reverence. No account of the dignity of being *human* is worth its salt without them.

The excellence or worthiness that shines forth in human beings is always something that arouses our admiration and respect. Still, there are partisans of human dignity who reject such judgments of excellence or worth, insisting that no one person lives a life more worthy than another's. Human dignity, they assert, is something every human being—base or noble, wicked or righteous—enjoys equally, simply by virtue of his human *being*.

What is the basis of this claim, and what is its purpose? To begin with, those who advance it seek to prevent the display of contempt, and especially contempt with lethal consequences, toward those who do not "measure up." They wish to insure a solid level of human worth that no one can deny to any fellow human being, to lean against the widespread tendency to treat the foreigner and the enemy, the misfit and the deviant, or the demented and the disabled as less human or less worthy than oneself—and especially as unworthy of basic respect and continued existence. And, following the unspeakable horrors perpetrated in the 20th century, they wish at the very least to provide a moral barrier against the liquidation of human beings often practiced by people acting in the name of their own sense of superior worth.

But even granting the soundness of this purpose—which I embrace wholeheartedly—asserting that we all have "equal dignity" does not, by itself, make it so. Mere assertion will not convince the skeptic or refute the deniers of human dignity. We need to establish the *grounds* for thinking that all human beings—whether dignified or not in their conduct—actually have full and equal human dignity, or should be treated as if they did.

The first and perhaps best ground remains practical and political. If you or your government (or my doctor or HMO) wants to claim that, for reasons of race or ethnicity or disability or dementia, I am not your equal in humanity, and, further, if you mean to justify harming or neglecting me on the basis of that claim, the assertion of universal human dignity exists to get in your way. The burden of proof shifts to you, to show why I am not humanly speaking your equal: *you* must prove why you are entitled to put a saddle and bridle on me and ride me like a horse, or to deny me the bread that I have earned with the sweat of my brow, or to dispatch me from this world because I have a "low quality of life."

You will, in fact, face an impossible task: you will be unable to prove that you possess God-like knowledge of the worth of individual souls or that you carry the proper scale of human worth for finding me insufficiently "weighty" to deserve to breathe the air. In this approach, I offer not a metaphysically grounded proof but a rhetorically effective demonstration that I, like you, am a somebody, like you born of woman and destined to die, like you a member of the human species each of whose members knows from the inside the goodness of his own life and liberty.

Mention of life and liberty reminds us that, for Americans, the doctrine of human equality and equal humanity has its most famous and resounding expression in the Declaration of Independence. It is, in fact, to the principles of the Declaration that some people repair in seeking to ground the dignity of human being, and it makes a certain sense to do so. Americans, in declaring themselves a separate people, began by asserting their belief in the truth that "all men are created equal." However human beings may differ in talent, accomplishment, social station, race, or religion, they are, according to the Declaration, self-evidently equal, at least in this: "That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable

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rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

These passages have always seemed to me to be, exactly as claimed, self-evidently true. But they do not go far enough in providing a ground for the equal *dignity* of human being as such. True, some interpreters of these passages suggest that all human beings have dignity because God gave it to them. But the text does not say that the Creator gave all men dignity; it speaks not of equal dignity but of equal rights, and the relation between the two is not as clear as we might wish.

In its 18th-century meaning, the natural "right to life" is not a right to be or to stay alive, or even a right not to be killed or harmed. It is, rather, a right to practice active self-preservation, a right to defend, protect, and preserve my life not only against those who threaten it but also in the face of those who would deny the rightfulness of my liberty to do so (for example, by insisting that I must "turn the other cheek"). The right to life is a (negative) right against interference with acts of self-preservation, and it rests not on anything lofty, such as dignity, but on the precariousness of human life and especially on the self-conscious passion that each of us legitimately has for our own continued existence.

It follows that human dignity is not the foundation of these inalienable rights; nor is dignity ours by virtue of the mere fact that we possess them. Instead, the true manifestation of dignity in the American founding appears at the end of the Declaration, where the signers proclaim: "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." *Having* equal natural rights is neutral with respect to dignity; *exercising* them in the face of their denial carries the dignity of self-assertion; *defending* with one's life and honor the rights of a whole people is high dignity indeed.

Others, granting that our equal dignity resides not in our rights, locate it in the more fundamental truth that makes those rights necessary: our common mortal fate and our equal capacity to suffer. But there is nothing dignified in vulnerability as such or in the fact of suffering per se. A sufferer merely undergoes, merely receives, as passive patient, what is inflicted by the active "agent," whether natural, human, or divine. For Christians, Christ on the cross may be regarded as the supreme exemplar of human dignity; but even here it is not suffering as such but suffering understood and accepted as sacrificial and redemptive that alone makes the crucified Jesus, for Christians, the epitome of dignity. If there is dignity to be found in the vicinity of suffering, it consists either in the purpose for which suffering is borne or in the manner in which it is endured. Not everyone has the requisite virtue or strength of soul, and it therefore cannot be the basis of the equal dignity of human *being*.

A DEEPER ground for our equal human dignity—natural and ontological, not practical or political—may perhaps be found in our equal membership in the human species. All of us are members of the class *Homo sapiens*, sharing thereby in whatever dignity adheres to the class as a whole, and especially in contrast with the dignity of other animals.

There is surely something to this suggestion. Even when we condemn or show contempt for another person—and even when such condemnation is richly deserved, as, for example, in the case of a Stalin or a Hitler—we cannot help noticing that he is, alas, "one of us." Indeed, the condemnation comes precisely from the great gap between despicable deeds and what we have good reason to expect from another member of our species; we do not find fault with lions and tigers for *their* predatory and lethal conduct.

As it happens, the human "species-form" or *gestalt*—upright posture, eyes to the horizon, hands fit for grasping, fingers for pointing, arms for embracing or cradling, and mouths for speaking and kissing no less than for eating—functions silently to elicit a primordial recognition from our fellow species members. Such mutual identification is the basis of hospitality to strangers, the acts of good Samaritans, or even just a nod of human kinship when we pass one another on the street. This salutary reminder of our common humanity, even in the face of severe deformity or degradation, puts a limit on possible tendencies to banish another person, in thought or in deed, from the realm of human concern and connectedness or even from the world of the living. Preventing many an outrage and many a violation, it also encourages many a sympathetic word and many a charitable deed.

So far, so good. Yet, once again, problems arise if we are compelled to answer just what it is about membership in *Homo sapiens* that justifies allowing our "species pride" to guarantee the inviolability of our life and being. After all, the (higher) animals, too, are not without their special dignity and special standing. Our being alive, and our being members of a closed interbreeding population, are prop-

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erties that belong also to chimpanzees and cheetahs and kangaroos.

Thus the elevated moral status of the human species must again turn on something else: the special capacities and powers that are ours and ours alone among the creatures. Such distinctively human features include the capacities for thought, image-making, freedom, and moral choice, a sense of beauty, love and friendship, song and dance, family and civic life, the moral life, and the impulse to worship.

Yet once we introduce these material properties, we will be hard-pressed not to assess the dignity of *particular* human beings in terms of the degree to which they actually manifest them. For the universal attribution of dignity to human beings on the basis of specific human attributes pays tribute only to our potentiality, to the possibilities for human excellence. *Full* dignity will depend on *realizing* these possibilities.

For partisans of the equal dignity of human being, the search for its content has therefore reached a troubling point. The ground of our dignity lies in the humanly specific potentialities of the human species. But this basic dignity is not yet dignity in full, not the *realized* dignity of fine human activity. What, then, of the dignity of those members of our species who have lost or who have never attained these capacities, as well as those who use them badly or wickedly?

Having now come at human dignity from two directions—first from the dignity of flourishing humanity, beginning at its heroic peak, and then from the dignity of human life at its primordial level of mere existence—we may note a curious coincidence. Once we learn how to find virtue and worthiness in the doings of everyday life, the more "aristocratic" account cannot help being universalized and democratized; and once we are forced to specify what it is about human beings as a class that gives them special dignity, the more "egalitarian" account cannot help introducing standards of particular excellences. This convergence invites the suggestion that the two aspects of dignity actually have something to do with one another—indeed, that they may be mutually implicated and interdependent.

Let me suggest three ways in which this is so.

First, the flourishing of human possibility, in all its admirable forms, depends absolutely on active human vitality, that is, on the mere existence and well-working of the enlivened human body. And just as the higher human powers and activities depend upon the lower for their existence, so the lower depend on the higher for their standing. What I have been calling the basic dignity of human *being*—sometimes expressed as the "sanctity of human life," or the "respect owed to human life" as such—depends on the higher dignity of being *human*.

This mutual dependence can be clearly illuminated if we ask why murder is wrong, and why all civilized people hold innocent life to be inviolable. Particularly helpful here is the biblical story of the Noahide law and covenant in Genesis 9, where, unlike in the more famous enunciation of a similar prohibition in the Ten Commandments ("Thou shalt not murder," Exodus 20), a specific reason is given for why murder is wrong.

Before the flood, human beings lived in the absence of law or civil society. The result appears to be something like what Hobbes called the state of nature, characterized as a condition of the war of each against all. Immediately after the flood, primordial law and justice are instituted, and nascent civil society is founded. At the forefront of this new order is a newly articulated respect for human life, expressed in the announcement of the punishment for homicide: "Whoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God was man made."

In this cardinal law, the threat of capital punishment stands as a deterrent to murder and provides a motive for obedience. But the measure of the punishment is instructive. By equating a life for a life—no *more* than a life for a life, and the life only of the murderer and not, for example, also of his wife and children—the threatened punishment implicitly teaches the equal worth of each human life. Such equality can be grounded only in the equal humanity of each human being.

But murder is to be avoided not only to avoid the punishment. There is also a deep reason that makes murder wrong: namely, man's divine-like (image-of-God) status. Any man's very *being* requires that we respect his life, and human life is to be respected more than animal life because man is more than an animal; man is godlike. Note that the truth of the Bible's assertion here does not rest on biblical authority. Man's more-than-animal status is proved whenever human beings, possessing the godlike powers of reason, freedom, judgment, and moral concern, quit the state of nature and set up life under a law like this one, as only the godlike animal can do. The demand for law-abidingness and for punishing transgression both insists on and demonstrates the superiority of man.

We reach a crucial conclusion: the inviolability

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of human life rests absolutely on the higher dignity—the godlike-ness—of human beings. Yet man is, at most, only god*ly*; he is not God or a god. To be an image is also to be different from that of which one is an image. Man is, at most, a mere likeness of God. With us, seemingly godly powers and concerns are conjoined with animality. God's image is tied to blood, which is the life.

This point, too, stands apart from the text that teaches it. Everything high about human life—thinking, judging, loving, willing, acting—depends absolutely on everything low—metabolism, digestion, respiration, circulation, excretion. In the case of human beings, "divinity" needs blood, or "mere" life, to sustain itself. And because of what it holds up, human blood (that is, human life) deserves special respect, beyond what is owed to life as such. The biblical text elegantly mirrors this truth about its subject, merging both high and low: though the reason given for punishing murder concerns man's godliness, the *injunction* concerns man's blood. Respect the godlike; do not shed its blood. Respect for anything human requires respecting everything human, requires respecting human *being* as such.

SECOND, even as the dignity of being human depends for its very existence on the presence and worth of human vitality, everything humanly high also gets its energizing *impetus* from what is humanly low. Necessity is not only the mother of invention; it is also the mother of excellence, love, and the ties that bind and enrich human life. Like the downward pull of gravity without which the dancer cannot dance, the downward pull of bodily necessity and fate makes possible the dignified journey of a truly human life. Human aspiration depends absolutely on our being creatures of need and finitude, and hence of longings and attachments. Pure reason and pure mind have no aspiration; the rational animal aspires in large part because he is an animal and not an angel or a god.

Once again it is our in-between status—at once godlike and animal—that is the deep truth about our nature, the ground of our special standing, and the wherewithal of our flourishing.

Perhaps the most profound account of human aspiration is contained in Socrates' speech about eros in Plato's *Symposium*. Eros, according to Socrates' account, is the heart of the human soul, an animating power born of lack but pointed upward. Eros emerges as both self-seeking and overflowingly generative—at bottom, the fruit of the peculiar conjunction of, and competition between, two conflicting aspirations joined in a single living body, both tied to our finitude: the impulse to self-preservation and the urge to reproduce. The former is a self-regarding concern for our own personal permanence and satisfaction; the latter is a self-forgetting aspiration for something that transcends our own finite existence, and for the sake of which we spend and even give our lives.

Other animals, of course, live with these twin and opposing drives. But eros in the other animals, who are unaware of the tension between the two drives, manifests itself exclusively in the activity of procreation and the care of offspring—an essential aspect of the dignity of all animal life. Socrates speaks of the self-sacrifice often displayed by animals on behalf of their young, and I would add that all animal life, by one path or another, imitates the "noble" model of the salmon, swimming upstream to spawn and die.

But eros comes fully into its own as the arrow pointing upward only in the human animal, who is *conscious* of the doubleness in his soul and is driven to devise a life based in part on the tension between the opposing forces. In the human case, the fruits of "erotic giving-birth" are not only human children but also the arts and crafts, song and story, noble deeds and customs, fine character, the search for wisdom, and a reaching for the eternal and divine—all conceived by resourcefulness to overcome our experienced lack and limitation and all guided by a divination of that which would be wholly good and lacking in nothing.

THIS TRANSCENDENT possibility is the third aspect of the relationship between what is humanly low and what is humanly high; indeed, it points us to what is both high and highest. And here, too, an ancient story shows us the point.

In the Garden of Eden, the serpent tempts the woman into disobedience by promising that if she and the man eat from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and bad, their eyes will be open and they "will be as gods, knowing good and bad." But, as the text comments with irony, when the human pair disobey, "their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked." Far from being as gods, they discover their own sexuality, with its shameful implications: their incompleteness, their abject neediness of each other, their subjection to a power within that moves them toward a goal they do not understand, and the ungodly bodily ways in which this power insists on being satisfied—not standing upright contemplating heaven, but lying down embracing necessity.

As in Socrates' account, the discovery of human

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lowliness is the spur to rise. But here it comes in two stages, one purely human, the other something more. Refusing to accept their shame lying down, the human beings take matters into their own hands: "and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves girdles." In this act of covering their nakedness out of a concern for each other's approbation, human lust is turned into a longing for something more than sexual satisfaction. Shame and love are born twins, delivered with the help of the arts of modesty and beautification.

But there is more. Immediately after covering their nakedness, "they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the Garden"—the first reported instance of human recognition of and attention to the divine. For it is only in acknowledging our lowliness that we human beings can also discover what is truly high. The turn toward the divine is founded on our discovery of our own lack of divinity, of our own insufficiency.

It is a delicate moment: having followed their eyes to alluring temptations that promise wisdom, human beings come to see, again through their eyes, their own insufficiency. Still trusting appearances but seeking to beautify them, they set about adorning themselves in order to find favor in the sight of the beloved. Lustful eyes give way to admiring ones, by means of intervening modesty and art. Yet sight and love alone do not fully disclose the truth of our human situation. Human beings must open their ears as well as their eyes; they must hearken to a calling. Eyes opened by shamefaced love, the prototypical human pair are able to hear the transcendent voice.

Thus, awe, too, is born twin to shame, and is soon elaborated into a desire to close with and have a relationship with the divine. The dignity of being human, rooted in the dignity of life itself and flourishing in a manner seemingly issuing only in human pride, completes itself and stands tallest when we bow our heads and lift our hearts in recognition of powers greater than our own.

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OBSERVATIONS

What the Settlements Have Achieved

Hillel Halkin

OF ALL the criticisms that have been leveled at Israel over the Palestinian question, the harshest may be those made of Jewish settlement in the occupied territories, particularly the West Bank. The settlers, it has been said, have robbed the Palestinians of their land; have dealt with them brutally; have thus been responsible for Palestinian terrorism, which the apartheid system of roads and checkpoints that protects them has only made worse; and have twisted the arms of Israel's governments to expand the settlement project and refuse to part with conquered land in return for the peace agreement that would then be attainable. They are the root of all evil in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which could otherwise have been settled long ago.

Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar's book about West Bank settlement, *Lords of the Land*, which first appeared in Hebrew in Israel in 2005 and has now been translated into English, does nothing to challenge these notions.* On the contrary, it adopts them unreservedly. Given Zertal and Eldar's backgrounds, this is hardly surprising.

Zertal is an Israeli historian on the political Left who now teaches at the University of Basel, Switzerland; her one previous book, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel*, argued that Zionism cynically manipulated the remnants of European Jewry into joining the struggle for a Jewish state in Palestine when they would have been better off remaining in postwar Europe. Eldar is a senior columnist at the Hebrew newspaper *Ha'aretz*, in which he writes frequently about Israel and the Palestinians. In this capacity he has untiringly argued that Israel must withdraw to its pre-June 1967 borders and that a refusal to do so is a refusal to make peace.

With two such authors, the fix is in from the start. Although *Lords of the Land* purports to be a history of the settlement movement, it is more a political attack on it. Already in its opening pages we are told that "the prolonged military occupation and the Jewish settlements that are perpetuating it have . . . brought Israel's democracy and its political culture to the brink of an abyss"; that most of the settlements "look fragile, neglected, ephemeral, as though they lack a vitality of their own" (how so feeble an enterprise could wield so much power is never explained); and that the settlements embody "the culture of death and the cult of death." Further on, we are informed that the settlers resemble "the ecstatic devotees of a crazed cult"; that "their strangeness to the land . . . and their uncanniness in the landscape [is] evident"; that their claim to a historical connection with the biblical territories of Judea and Samaria is "by definition . . . in the realm of the 'imagined'"; and so on and so forth. Since this is exactly what most of the world believes about the settlements, *Lords of the Land* has done well internationally. There is nothing like being told in 500 pages that you're right.

But even as biased history, *Lords of the Land* does not begin to cover its subject. The story it tells is not that of Jewish settlement in the West Bank but that of Gush Emunim, the "Bloc of the Faithful," a militant set-

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tlers' organization founded in the early 1970's that combined religious fervor with political activism and a readiness to brave physical danger. It was Gush Emunim and its ideological heirs, with their Zionist messianism, that established dozens of small settlements and hilltop outposts deep in the West Bank and that have been frequently in conflict with their Palestinian neighbors and with Israeli governments felt by them to be insufficiently supportive. The stereotype of the West Bank settler as a belligerently bearded Jew with a knit skullcap on his head, a Bible in one hand and a rifle in the other, is a caricaturized version of the Gush Emunim ideal, and Zertal and Eldar have done all they can to perpetuate it.

And yet such settlers account for barely 10 percent of the more than 400,000 Israelis living today beyond the "green line," the pre-June 1967 Israeli-Jordanian border. Roughly half of the total reside in urban neighborhoods in Jerusalem. Most of the remainder are in middle-sized towns that are close to the old border and/or within an easy commute of Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. An increasingly large proportion of them consists of non- or even anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox Jews who have moved to such rapidly developing locations as Betar Illit and Kiryat Sefer; another sizable element, found in places like Ariel and Ma'aleh Adumim, is composed mostly of secular Israelis; and a much smaller group inhabits moshavim and kibbutzim, collective farming settlements, in the Jordan Valley.

Few of these 350,000 Israelis have moved to the occupied territories for ideological reasons or have ever been embroiled with local Palestinians or government authorities. Most chose to live where they do because they have purchased affordable housing in well-planned and pleasant communities not far from their places of work. And none of them is dealt with in Zertal and Eldar's book. As far as *Lords of the Land* is concerned, West Bank settlement and Gush Emunim are one and the same.

TWO DIFFERENT engines drove West Bank settlement from the start. One, of which Gush Emunim was indeed for a while the main representative, was the ideological belief in an "undivided land of Israel." (This is a better translation of the Hebrew *eretz yisra'el ha-sh'lema* than the more common "greater land of Israel," which suggests the acquisition of expanses considerably beyond the slightly over 2,000 square miles, an area the size of the state of Delaware, that comprise the West Bank.) The other was the pragmatic desire to redraw Israel's pre-June 1967 borders in order to make them militarily more secure. Because these two engines often ran in tandem, they have frequently been confused. Yet no sober thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or its resolution can take place without distinguishing between them.

Despite Zertal and Eldar's absurd assertion to the contrary, a deep religious and emotional attachment to the land of Israel was not something "imagined" by Gush Emunim. It was part of the patrimony of the Jewish people, which would never have turned to Zionism in the first place had that attachment not existed. As fate would have it, when Israel's war of independence ended at the 1948-49 ceasefire lines with Jordan, most of the sites most deeply engraved in Jewish historical memory—the old city of Jerusalem, the Western Wall, the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, the biblical heartland of Judea and Samaria—were left on the Jordanian side of the frontier, and Jewish access to them was denied.

To think that, when these areas were suddenly and unexpectedly restored to Jewish control in 1967, there could have failed to be a surge of popular sentiment for settling and retaining them is to be ignorant of Jewish history and Jewish feelings. This sentiment crystallized without the help of Gush Emunim, which did not appear on the scene until several years later. While strongest on the political Right, it was by no means confined to it.

Nevertheless, between 1967 and 1974, a period during which Israel's Arab neighbors repeatedly rejected the possibility of peace with a Jewish state, the Labor governments in power sought to keep a tight rein on non-pragmatically motivated settlement. Leading labor politicians like Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yigal Allon, and Moshe Dayan, although differing in their proposed solutions for the occupied territories, all held that there were political, demographic, and moral restraints on annexing them and that Jews should not be allowed to settle in all parts of them.

At the same time, though, these leaders were determined to address the problem of Israel's military vulnerability, a consequence of its being pinched to the bone by the 1948-49 ceasefire lines in two sectors: the central coastal plain from Tel Aviv northward, where much of the country's population was concentrated within ten or twelve miles of the old frontier, and Jerusalem, whose Jewish half and the approach to it had formed a thin wedge surrounded by Jordanian territory. No nation with hostile or potentially hostile neighbors could be safe within such borders, and it was, except on the far Left, a matter of national consensus in those years that there could be no return to them.

In the case of Jerusalem, the situation was partially rectified by the annexation of the city's Arab neighborhoods and their outskirts immediately following the 1967 war—the only part of the West Bank to be officially made part of Israel to this day. In addition, the Labor government authorized the resettlement of the "Etsyon Bloc" southwest of Jerusalem, an enclave in which several kibbutzim and their lands had

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been overrun by the Jordanian army in the 1948 fighting, and permitted a small group of Jews to move into Hebron. At the outset, the line was held there.

For the coastal plain, there were two options. One was to push the border eastward, a problematic move because it would have meant incorporating into Israel large Arab towns like Tulkarm and Kalkilya. The other, originally proposed by Yigal Allon, was to leave the border where it was while annexing the Jordan Valley, a long strip of semi-arid, sparsely populated land, part of the great Syrian-African rift, running between the West Bank's mountains and the Jordan River. By holding on to the valley and its overlooking hills, Israel could effectively surround the West Bank while interfering minimally in Palestinian life and absorbing few Palestinians, and would be optimally positioned to meet any Arab attack from the east. A corridor around Jericho would be left in Arab hands to provide contiguity with Jordan—which, it was assumed, would repossess the West Bank once a peace agreement was signed—and Israelis would be free to visit the historical and religious sites that meant so much to them.

Thus was born the "Allon plan," which guided Israeli policy until after the 1973 Yom Kippur war. It eventually collapsed in two stages. The first was indeed the work of Gush Emunim, which through an orchestrated campaign of public relations, political lobbying, and wildcat settlements broke the resistance of the government of Yitzhak Rabin and obtained permission to found several small villages in the central West Bank, well beyond the 1967 borders. The second was the 1977 electoral victory of Menachem Begin. Themselves ideologically committed to an "undivided land of Israel," Begin and his Likud party opened the entire West Bank to settlement and actively encouraged it and supported it, with the result that the Jewish population of the area, no more than 10,000 or so in 1977, now increased quickly.

How could Israel afford demographically to hold on to a region with a large Arab population or get away with it politically? Likud's answer was Begin's "autonomy plan," according to which the Palestinians of the West Bank would be given self-rule as the inhabitants of an Israeli protectorate without being granted either their independence or Israeli citizenship. Begin fought for the acceptance of this plan in Israel's peace negotiations with Egypt, but although it was included in the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, it was limited at Cairo's insistence to a five-year transitional period, following which a more permanent arrangement was to be found.

Meanwhile, the Likud governments that ruled for thirteen of the fifteen years between 1977 and 1992 changed the thrust of the settlement enterprise. Coming to the conclusion that small, Gush Emunim-type villages could not significantly populate the West Bank, they shifted the emphasis to larger commuting towns that would attract a broad cross-section of Israelis. In this manner there sprang up settlements like Ariel in Samaria and Ma'aleh Adumim in the Judean desert east of Jerusalem, each today with some 30,000 inhabitants. And in a later phase, with the realization that the greatest potential for West Bank settlement lay in Israel's ultra-Orthodox community, whose large, low-income families could be enticed to leave their overcrowded quarters in Israel proper for cheap, government-subsidized housing in the territories, several exclusively ultra-Orthodox townships were built. Today these are the most rapidly expanding settlements in the West Bank. One of them, Betar Illit, a short distance southwest of Jerusalem, has already surpassed Ariel and Ma'aleh Adumin in population and will soon leave them far behind.

Not that Gush Emunim was neglected in this period; its small settlements, too, continued to grow, if at a slower rate. The one West Bank sector that languished was the Jordan Valley. Conditions there, where temperatures can reach 120 degrees in summer, were difficult; the valley was far from the rest of Israel and its urban centers; though its agricultural potential was great, agriculture in Israel was a declining economic sector; and given Likud's policy of holding on to the whole West Bank, the Allon plan was no longer relevant. Once Likud came to power, no serious attempts were made to develop the Jordan Valley, and government investment in it was minimal. Its Jewish population today is barely 8,000, about the same as it was twenty years ago.

No Israeli government since 1967 ever had a coherent West Bank settlement policy. The Allon plan made geostrategic and demographic sense, but without settling large numbers of Jews in the Jordan Valley, as was done in east Jerusalem and in the so-called "settlement blocs" that were mostly close to the old borders, there was no way of establishing an effective presence there. As for the Likud's autonomy plan, it was sheer fantasy from the start. Never put into practice because the Palestinians rejected it in 1979, it had no chance in any case of outliving the five years that Egypt was willing to grant it. By the time of the 1993 Oslo agreement and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, it had been consigned to ancient history.

This brings us to Ariel Sharon's "disengagement plan." Implemented in Gaza in 2005, and clearly meant for the West Bank as well, it was a belated acknowledgment by Israel's moderate political Right that Israeli control over the whole West Bank was impossible. Convinced, however, by the failure of the Camp David and Taba summits in the year 2000 that that there was no prospect of getting the Palestinian Authority to agree to even relatively small

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border rectifications in Israel's favor, which would have involved some 10 percent of the West Bank, Sharon decided, first, to build a security fence along the route of the frontier he envisioned, and then to withdraw to it unilaterally, counting on its gaining de-facto international recognition sooner or later. The fence was routed to take in the major settlement blocs while excluding as many Palestinian towns and villages as possible, and was conceived as encompassing about three-quarters of the West Bank's settlers when finished.

The remaining quarter, roughly 60,000 settlers, would, according to Sharon's plan, have to be evacuated, as were the Jewish inhabitants of the Gaza Strip. Most of these 60,000 are of the Gush Emunim stripe—the same "lords of the land" who, Zertal and Eldar believe, have worked their will with all Israeli governments. But they did not work it in Gaza, and while, in the wake of the Hamas takeover there, unilateral disengagement is no longer on the agenda of the government of Ehud Olmert, the perceived necessity for it is likely to resurface sooner than one might think. The failure, cancellation, or indefinite postponement of the Israel-Palestinian "peace conference" scheduled for Annapolis in late November or December may be all it takes to make this happen.

THE BORDER with the West Bank that the security fence delineates is not only unacceptable to the Palestinians, it is far from ideal for Israel. It winds tortuously back and forth between Jewish settlements and Arab towns and villages; it leaves much of the coastal plain no farther from the 1948-49 ceasefire lines than it was before 1967; and it surrenders the Jordan Valley, which will revert to Palestinian hands. Should Israel ever have to fight another war with an Arab world out to destroy it, or simply have to contend with a rogue Palestinian state that permits attacks on it, its eastern front will still be its most vulnerable.

Nevertheless, it will be considerably less vulnerable than it would be if Israel were to withdraw all the way to the 1967 borders. With the fence in place, Jerusalem will be buffered on all sides by Jewish suburbs and hinterland, whose eastern edge at Ma'aleh Adumim, situated on the road to Jericho, overlooks the southern Jordan Valley and could serve as a military jumping-off point to there; the connection between the northern and southern West Bank, which will have to run between Ma'aleh Adumim and the valley, will be easily interdictable; and salients of Israeli territory running from the coastal plain into the hills of Samaria will help protect Tel Aviv and allow Israel's army to position itself close to the top of the West Bank's central mountain ridge and within easy striking distance of its main north-south highway. Although these advantages might seem trivial in an age of modern warfare, they should not be made light of. Even modern warfare is ultimately decided on the ground.

If Israel does end up with these geographical advantages, it will be due to one thing alone: the settlement blocs, which in certain parts of the West Bank have concentrated too many Jews to evacuate. This was recognized by President Bush in his statement of April 2004 that any Israeli-Palestinian agreement must take into account the changed reality of Israeli "population centers" on the other side of the 1967 border. Had such "population centers" not existed, even the United States, Israel's greatest friend, would be calling today for a near-total withdrawal to the 1967 lines.

In this respect, the settlement enterprise, though the world may think otherwise, has not failed. It has been a considerable, if not total, success. Because of it, Israel will be more secure. Far from having demonstrated that settling Jews in large numbers across the 1967 border was folly, it has shown that where enough Jews have been settled in the right places, Israel has benefited.

The failure is that of those, the sole subjects of *Lords of the Land*, who settled small numbers of Jews in the wrong places. It is possible to understand and admire the depth of these settlers' commitment to the land of Israel and their courage in risking their lives for their beliefs; it is also necessary, however, to acknowledge the futility of what they sought to achieve. Huge sums were spent on the endeavor; tens of thousands of lives were invested in it; hundreds of lives were lost to Palestinian terror; and Palestinian lives, too, were disrupted and embittered—all for a dream that had no chance of fulfillment. Israel could never have swallowed the two million Palestinians of the West Bank without choking on them. If Zertal and Eldar are right about anything, it is about this.

Had all this effort been put into the Jordan Valley instead, so that it too would have comprised a "settlement bloc" that Israel could not be expected to abandon, both Israel and the Palestinians would be better off. The Allon plan, eminently rational when first conceived, looks even better today. Without the Jordan Valley, which is now lost to it, Israel will be in a worse position than it need have been.

But of course this is said with the benefit of hindsight. The great enemy of rationality is rationalization. In the aftermath of Israel's 1967 victory, which seemed miraculous in every respect, the call for an undivided land of Israel was emotionally hard to resist. It was only too easy to find ways of justifying it. Many of the Palestinians of the West Bank, it was said, would emigrate (as they indeed had done to the east bank of the Jordan before 1967 and continued to do to the Persian Gulf until the 1991 Gulf war). Those who did not would grow accustomed to Israeli rule. Jewish immigration would offset their high

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birthrate (as for a short while it did during the great wave of immigration from the ex-Soviet Union in 1990-91). The world would come to accept the West Bank's being part of Israel. And it was inconceivable that the only place in the world, apart from Saudi Arabia, in which Jews were forbidden to live should be in their own historic homeland.

Some of these arguments were stronger than others; whoever wanted to be convinced by them was convinced. And even when the head was not persuaded, the heart often was. I can remember how in the 1970's and 80's, when it was already clear to me that Gush Emunim-type settlements in the heart of the West Bank were a mistake, I nevertheless thrilled to each new one of them that was established. Such Jewish feelings are alien to Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, who do not begin to comprehend what they are about. But they also do not comprehend that Israel has real enemies and real security needs, and that formal peace agreements with its neighbors are no guarantee that it will not have to fight again. Wars generally break out between countries that have been at peace.

Could the Allon plan have been successfully carried out and the tragic waste of the Gush Emunim settlements avoided? Probably not. Countries, like people, sometimes only learn by making costly mistakes. Yet thanks to the settlement blocs that are not even in the index of *Lords of the Land*, it has been possible in part to make up for that waste. This case needs to be made to all those who believe, like Zertal and Eldar, that the 1948-49 cease-fire lines, never recognized as permanent by a single Arab state before 1967, became sacred as soon as the Arabs lost a war they started. Israel had the right to change these lines in accordance with its needs, and it is a good thing that the settlements have made that possible.

OBSERVATIONS

The Cult of the Difficult

Terry Teachout

THE HISTORY of Western art in the 20th century is a tempestuous chronicle of rebellion, transformation, re-evaluation, and renewal. For those of us who lived through its latter half, it hardly seems possible that the story is now over—that modernism, to put it another way, is a thing of the past. Though a few major protagonists remain alive and active, the mainstream of artistic endeavor has moved on, leaving to critics and historians the retrospective tasks of narrative and stock-taking.

As yet, no real attempt has been made to supply a comprehensive chronicle of modernism, one that would cut across media and genres to explain how a movement whose original hallmark was the deliberate repudiation of easy accessibility came to dominate the world of art. The reason for this is that few writers, if any, are competent to discuss with equal assurance the works of architects, choreographers, composers, filmmakers, novelists, painters, and poets. Yet how else can one produce a full-scale account of the modern movement in art? The only alternative, to focus on bits and pieces, elides the very idea of modernism, whose significance lay in the fact that it exerted its transformative power on art and artists of all kinds.

FOR THIS reason, Peter Gay, the author of *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*, deserves much credit for having taken on the daunting task of making sense out of the whole phenomenon and for doing so with

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some success.* This success arises in part from the fact that Gay, who is a historian rather than a critic, has chosen to emphasize description over evaluation, mostly accepting the common estimates of the relative importance of key figures. In addition, he has been extremely selective in his choice of these figures, thus making it possible to compress and simplify the story in the interest of greater intelligibility. As he explains in the book's preface, his aim was

> not to compile an expansive catalog of all the strands and leading figures in modernism, but to examine their presence in culture and to discover, if possible, whether they coalesce to define a single cultural entity.

The problem with this approach, however, is that it runs the risk of becoming over-obvious and even tautological. "To the best of my knowledge, no scholar has ever tried to map all the manifestations of modernism as making up a single historical epoch," Gay claims. This may be literally true, but, from the privileged vantage point of late 2007, the *fact* that modernism constitutes a "single historical epoch" is surely all but self-evident. Moreover, Gay's account of its rise and fall, though it has the great virtue of conceptual clarity, is far less successful at telling us which of modernism's best-known practitioners are most deserving of our attention today, or why some of them now seem so much more compelling than others.

THE MOST impressive thing about *Modernism* is the apparent ease with which Gay discusses so wide a range of artistic activity. "To appreciate two of the arts in a discerning manner is not unusual," the novelist Anthony Powell once remarked. "Where three are claimed, more often than not, grasp of the third shows signs of strain." The author of *Modernism* would seem to be an exception to this rule. Not only is Gay absolutely secure when talking about literature and the visual arts, but he writes almost as fluently about music and dance (which he treats, not altogether convincingly, as a single topic).

Similarly admirable is the frequent good sense that Gay brings to his description of the modernist project. He is quick, for instance, to note that the "bourgeoisophobia" (as Gustave Flaubert called it) that was so prominent a part of the modern artist's self-image was inconsistent both with the complex reality of middle-class life and with the receptivity to modern art shown by the hated bourgeoisie itself:

> The infuriated balletgoers who in 1911 noisily disrupted the premiere of Nijinsky and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* were followed by audiences that found this potent amalgam of radical score and radical choreography far from indigestible and really quite enjoyable. It is an apparent self-contradiction but a historical fact that modernist works, produced to provide an aura of heresy, should end up being called classics.

Conversely, as Gay also points out, modern artists were themselves quick to embrace the middle- and upper-middle-class style of life made possible by the bourgeoisie's lucrative embrace of their art. In similar fashion, their pose of radical individualism was contradicted by the "desire for companionship and reassurance" that led them to form schools and factions and to hammer out new aesthetic orthodoxies that were in many cases at least as rigid as the old-fashioned ones they had previously sought to overthrow.

In describing the emergence of these orthodoxies, Gay proves willing to describe modernism as it really was instead of taking the claims of its proponents at face value. But when it comes to *judging* the modernists, he is far less fresh in his thinking. Thus, Arnold Schoenberg is for him "the undisputed leader of the 20th-century upheaval in music"; Virginia Woolf is the peer of Henry James, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust; and D.W. Griffith, Sergei Eisenstein, Charlie Chaplin, and Orson Welles stand at "the summit of modernist moviemaking." Each of these individual claims is defensible—but taken together, they suggest a straight-faced artistic equivalent of Flaubert's satirical "dictionary of received ideas."

Nor does Gay have anything especially original to say about the actual output of the artists he discusses in *Modernism*, though the urbane patina of his prose helps to mask the commonplace quality of his observations. ("Debussy's work," he writes in one example that can stand for many, "was a delicate search, perfectly fitting into the world that modernist painters and poets were pursuing in their own way—the inner life and its felicitous portrayal.") Even when he moves beyond the realm of the certified masters to the contemporary scene, his assessments prove equally predictable: we are invited to accept Frank Gehry and Gabriel García Márquez as direct successors to the giants of modernism past.

To repeat, *Modernism* is a work of history, not criticism. But because art is his subject matter, Gay cannot shirk the making of critical judgments; they are implicit on every page. And it is difficult not to question the taste of an art historian who can, among other things, call the second-rate English choreographer John Cranko an "interesting competitor" to George Balanchine, declare with a straight face that Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* is "a historic masterpiece" and marked "the most sensational debut of a novelist since Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*," or put forward *Casablanca*, *Citizen Kane*, *His Girl Friday*, *La Femme du Boulanger*, and *The Third Man* as his personal list of the great films of the 20th century.

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NO LESS questionable—especially when viewed from the perspective of 2007—is the omnipresence of Sigmund Freud in Gay's narrative.

That Freud should figure prominently in a study of the idea of modernism is, of course, entirely appropriate, since his ideas were powerfully influential on many modern artists—though by no means all. Vladimir Nabokov, the quintessential modern novelist (and one who, perhaps not coincidentally, goes unmentioned in *Modernism*), curtly dismissed Freud as a "Viennese witch-doctor" who reduced the fruits of the human imagination to a set of "standardized symbols," of interest only to "the credulous and the vulgar." But the thinking of numerous other modernists was strongly shaped by Freud's theories of the unconscious mind and its effects on human behavior. Thomas Mann went so far as to call psychoanalysis "the greatest contribution to the art of the novel" to be made in modern times.

It stands to reason that Peter Gay, Freud's biographer and the author of many other books about the man and his times, should have chosen to emphasize the role of psychoanalysis in the development of modernism. What is more revealing is the near-obsessiveness with which he does so. Time and again, Freud is gratuitously dragged in, usually in order to bolster a cliché:

> All in all, Cézanne's artistic reactions to his inner turmoil shore up Freud's assertion that try as they will, humans cannot keep their secrets. . . . Freud seems not to have commented on the Expressionist dramatists of his time, but if he had, he could have used their work as persuasive evidence for the existence, indeed the virulence, of the Oedipus complex.

It is as if Gay thought that the imprimatur of the master were needed to legitimize even the most banal of his own opinions.

One would never suspect from reading *Modernism* that Freud's theories are now regarded as obsolete by the vast majority of medical practitioners and scientists, or that their erstwhile popularity is widely thought to have slowed the emergence of what the psychiatrist Paul McHugh has termed "evidence-based psychiatry," a discipline rooted not in theoretical speculation but in empirical research. In a telling metaphor, McHugh argues that modern-day psychiatry "can no more return to the old [Freudian] orthodoxy than Russia can revive the Soviet Union."*

Yet Gay stubbornly persists in presenting Freud not as a figure of historical significance but as a thinker of continuing *contemporary* relevance, in much the same way that aging Marxist historians like Eric Hobsbawm write about the 20th century as though the events they describe had not themselves demonstrated beyond the possibility of contradiction the nonsensicality of the Marxian theories they use to explain them. The gentlest thing to be said about Gay's passionate belief in Freud's relevance is that it lends to *Modernism* an air of quaintness—one that sits oddly alongside its author's equally passionate belief in the permanent immediacy of modern art.

WHAT OF the "big picture" of modernism painted by Gay? It is, at best, a partial portrait. For him, modernism consists of radical technical innovation placed in the service of "insubordination against ruling authority." This is a standard to which he hews so rigidly that even Anton Chekhov, an unambiguously modern writer, is said to have "worked at the margins of modernism" because he "did not modify the traditional theater" (a claim that will come as a surprise to anyone who has sat through one of the "well-made," plot-driven 19th-century plays that Chekhov helped to render as obsolete as Freud's theories).

Nor is Gay comfortable with those tradition-conscious modernists, like T.S. Eliot and Igor Stravinsky, who used the sharp-angled language of modern art to express their deep and paradoxical longing for a supra-rational authority with which to oppose the chaos of modern life. "It does not follow," Gay writes strenuously but unbelievably, "that Stravinsky abandoned originality while he searched, as he put it, for order. . . .[T]he religious meanings of [his] *Symphony of Psalms*, if any, must remain indeterminate." No less strikingly, Gay devotes just one paragraph to Eliot's *Four Quartets*, the religious-themed masterpiece of his middle age, while spending two pages on *After Strange Gods*, the 1933 lectures in which Eliot allowed free rein to his anti-Semitic views.

Just as Gay ignores or misinterprets the quest for order, so does he appear willfully to overlook the possibility that some branches of modernism were more successful than others. Why did the art-loving public embrace Stravinsky's neoclassicism but not Schoenberg's serialism? Why did experimental novels like James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* fail to exert the same enduring appeal as the paintings of the abstract expressionists—or, for that matter, the distinctively modern jazz and popular music about which Gay has nothing at all to say in *Modernism*? Could it be that, as I have previously argued, there were "in fact *two* modernisms, one deeply conservative and tradition-based, the other profoundly radical and antinomian," and that the first of these modernisms, not the second, is the one that has prevailed?†

SUCH A possibility seems not to have occurred to Gay. Though he acknowledges the attraction exercised by modernism on the middle class, he persists in dividing the art-

* McHugh's journalistic writings on the subject of Freud and his influence have been collected in *The Mind Has Mountains: Reflections on Society and Psychiatry* (2006).

† "Jazz as Modern Art" (COMMENTARY, January 2003).

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consuming public into three distinct groups:

> The cultured elite that alone nourishes modernism, the philistine bourgeoisie that professes not to understand the movement, the benighted masses that have no use for it, still exist. But their boundaries have been scrambled. With steady advances in the modern technology of leisure and its apparatuses, the artistic choices of the masses reaching deep into the middle classes have become more pronounced as they are increasingly subjected to advance testing and manipulation.

It is, in short, the old, old story: difficulty per se is a meaningful index of the validity of modern art, while those modernists who opted instead for what Aaron Copland called an "imposed simplicity" are by definition unserious panderers to the philistines. Having made the fatal mistake of supposing that art need not be rebarbatively complex in order to be truly modern, such benighted figures are accordingly excluded from Gay's pantheon. Small wonder, then, that the word "postmodern" is nowhere to be found in *Modernism*. Instead, the book ends with a modest hope: even though we now live in a recessive "age of musical comedies," it could yet be that "a revival of massive modernism" will someday bring about the welcome return of "concerts of difficult composers, exhibitions of difficult painters, printing of difficult poets and novelists, clients for difficult architects, even consumers for difficult movies."

To be sure, the author of *Modernism* is pessimistic about the prospects for such a renaissance of difficulty married to the spirit of "insubordination against ruling authority." Yet no other kind of art, it seems, would be sufficiently demanding for him or satisfy his taste for the arcane delights of "heresy." In the end, this says more about Peter Gay than it does about modernism.

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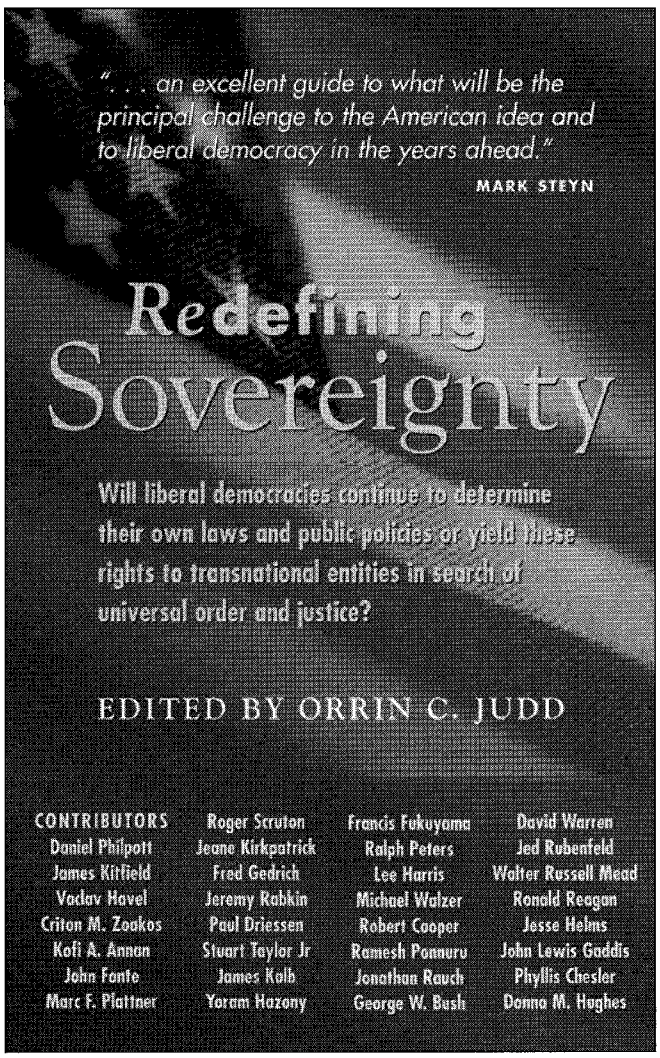

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Books in Review

Justice at Last

My Grandfather's Son: A Memoir

by Clarence Thomas

Harper. 304 pp. $26.95

Reviewed by
Andrew Ferguson

"I'd always been one to close my shutters to the world," writes Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in his moving new memoir. This admission arrives two-thirds of the way through the book, by which time no reader will be surprised.

Thomas is a brooder, and he has written a brooding book, full of recrimination, guilt, accusation, and worry. Scarcely a page goes by, scarcely a phase of his life is touched upon, without a dark reference to the author's inner turmoil, which seems to have been nearly constant. "I felt as if my soul had been pierced." "Instead of comfort I found only sorrow and confusion." "No one was going to take care of me." "My family, my faith, my vocation, the heroes who inspired me: all had been taken away from me." These are just a sample, though a representative one, plucked from a ten-page span covering four years of Thomas's early manhood.

How readers will react to this recurring tone of anguish will no doubt depend, like everything else these days, on their politics. Thomas's liberal and left-wing adversaries—including those members of the mainstream press who have troubled to write about the book, in tones alternately condescending and huffy—have already tried to scare off potential readers with warnings about his "rage," "anger," and "self-pity." Those who admire him—who have been impressed by his disciplined and well-wrought judicial opinions and moved by the dignity with which he has conducted his public life—will point out that Clarence Thomas has had a great deal to be angry about. He may be a "glass-half-empty" sort, but it is easy to see why. Somebody has always been trying to drain the glass—and the process did not start with Anita Hill.

The outlines of Thomas's life may be well known, but his story has never been laid down in such finely etched detail. He was born in 1948 in rural Georgia, to a troubled young woman and a no-account drifter who before too long abandoned the family. When Clarence was seven, he and his younger brother Myers were taken to Savannah to be raised by their maternal grandfather and his wife.

The boys called their grandfather "Daddy." Industrious and fiercely independent, he owned his own business, hauling wood, oil, coal, and ice. He spurned "relief," teaching the boys that dependence on government would "rob them of their freedom." And he paid for his grandchildren to go to an all-black Catholic school, where they wore uniforms and were disciplined by the Franciscan nuns. "Our first task was to get a good education," Thomas writes, "so that we could hold down a 'coat-and-tie job.'"

Daddy was a hard man—harder, on the evidence, than even Thomas wants to admit. "Our encounters with his belt or a switch were far from infrequent," he writes with excessive delicacy. "He meant to con-

Andrew Ferguson *is a senior editor at the* Weekly Standard *and the author most recently of* Land of Lincoln.

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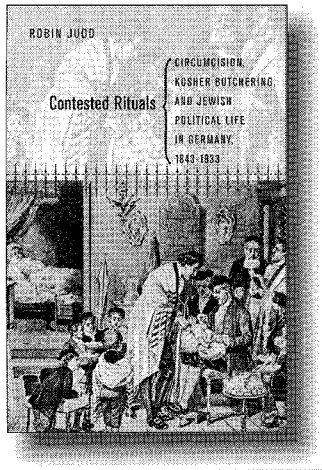

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trol every aspect of our lives. . . . In his presence there was no play, no fun, and little laughter." Daddy refused to let the boys join the Cub Scouts or play sports. When Myers and Clarence grew old enough to be enticed by the distractions of their rough neighborhood, Daddy bought a farm and sent them to tend the fields, where every summer they labored without let-up until the evening before school resumed in the fall. "Our small, soft hands blistered quickly at the start of each summer," Thomas recalls, "but Daddy never let us wear work gloves, which he considered a sign of weakness."

Thus sealed off from the larger world, both black and white, Clarence avoided the trouble that beckoned from every neighborhood street corner. His self-discipline and industry matched his grandfather's, earning him excellent grades in school and, eventually, admission to Immaculate Conception, a seminary in Missouri where he hoped to become a priest. Even then he had an inkling of how remarkable his upbringing had been, and how remarkable the man who had brought him up.

But an estrangement between the two was probably inevitable. It came when Clarence, doubting his religion and fed up with racial slights from his white classmates, dropped out of the seminary, finishing his undergraduate studies at Holy Cross College in Massachusetts before turning toward secular pursuits—at, as it happened, Yale Law School. Later he would learn from his brother that Daddy, who had never shown weakness or any emotion but anger, had wept most of the night after Clarence announced he was abandoning his hopes of the priesthood.

Still later, after a partial reconciliation, he would be astonished at the indulgence with which Daddy treated Clarence's own son Jamal, playing with the boy, showering him with sweets, and granting his every dizzy request. Clarence asked his grandfather to account for this difference. "Jamal," Daddy replied without hesitation, "is not my responsibility."

THIS MATERIAL is the stuff of what may endure as a classic American memoir, just as the figure of Daddy—"the greatest man I have ever known"—amounts to an astonishing literary creation, as impressive on the page as he must have been in life. If *My Grandfather's Son* falls just short of classic status, it is because, paradoxically enough, Daddy achieved his goal: Thomas won his "coat-and-tie job," and office work, alas, makes for unmemorable story-telling.

Having earned a law degree, he took a job with a large corporation, grew bored, and found his calling in government, first in Missouri as an assistant attorney general and later in Washington, D.C. with the Reagan administration. There, over the course of a decade, he rose from a minor bureaucratic post at the Department of Education to the chairmanship of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to, finally, a seat on the Supreme Court.

In these chapters, after Daddy drops from the story, the book's main interest consists in the unfolding of Thomas's intellectual and political education. Having had only glancing exposure to the white world when growing up, Thomas took his first large dose of white racial attitudes in elite academic institutions, where racism most often came (and still comes) in the guise of liberal condescension. His grandfather-bred sense of independence was offended by the general expectation that his race required him to subscribe to the shifting enthusiasms of Great Society liberalism. His response was first to lunge beyond liberalism into radicalism, and then, after intermittent stops at libertarianism and natural-law theory, to settle into Reagan conservatism.

How odd this trajectory seems

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will depend yet again on one's politics. For Thomas, the arrival at conservatism was a return to his roots, an affirmation of the way he had been raised: the political expression of his grandfather's belief in self-sufficiency, freedom, and individual dignity. He also knew that a black man espousing such views was bound to draw attention, for both good and ill. He is, as I have mentioned, naturally disposed to dwell on the ill; the good gets less attention than it deserves. Republicans grasped him like a talisman, and singled him out for advancement. Democrats took note of him, too.

A third of this book is devoted to Thomas's Supreme Court nomination in 1991 and Anita Hill's eleventh-hour accusations of sexual harassment that nearly did him in. For those who watched the hearings—and perhaps for those who did not—it makes harrowing reading, almost unbelievable in hindsight. At the time, hyperventilating commentators liked to compare the Hill-Thomas hearings to a Baby Boomer version of the confrontation between Whittaker Chambers and Alger Hiss. There is some truth in this, if you discount for the triviality that has always characterized the Boomers' encounter with history: Chambers and Hiss embodied a twilight ideological struggle over the fundamental requirements of human nature, whereas the Hill-Thomas hearings turned on whether one government bureaucrat had mentioned to another the possibility that there was a pubic hair on his can of Coca-Cola. Each generation gets the scandals it deserves.

At least *My Grandfather's Son* ends Thomas's own longstanding silence on Anita Hill's accusations, and provides some context from his point of view. Most important of all, it makes clear that his often-cited charge of a "high-tech lynching" on the part of liberals and Democrats was not a momentary outburst but a considered summation of a lifetime of painful experience. He believed then, and presumably still does, that any independent-minded black American could expect nothing less from the clerics of a dying status quo.

At considerable cost, he won in the end. His suffering, both here and earlier, was not pointless after all but rather redemptive, for himself if not yet for his country. At the close of the book, he is preparing to take his seat at his first conference of the Supreme Court. Fortified by the love of a remarkable wife, by pride in his own flourishing son, and by the memory of the man who made him, he seems to be on the cusp of happiness. It is as satisfying an ending as this brooding, courageous figure—one of the great public men of our time—can offer, at least so far, and no one who reads this singular memoir with sympathy and care can fail to be grateful for it.

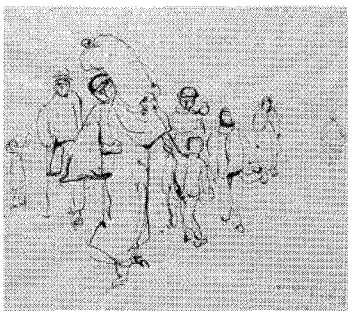
Mystic Chords

Musicophilia:
Tales of Music and the Brain
by Oliver Sacks
Knopf. 400 pp. $26.00

Reviewed by
Kevin Shapiro

A general surgeon once remarked to me that neurologists do not cure disease—they admire it. While the fairness of this statement is debatable, it is true that the therapeutic armamentarium of the neurologist is rather limited. When a bit of brain tissue is lost to a stroke, infection, or some other malady, the knowledge and skills that depend upon it tend to be lost as well, often irrecoverably. It is for

Kevin Shapiro's *article, "How the Mind Works," appeared in our May issue.*



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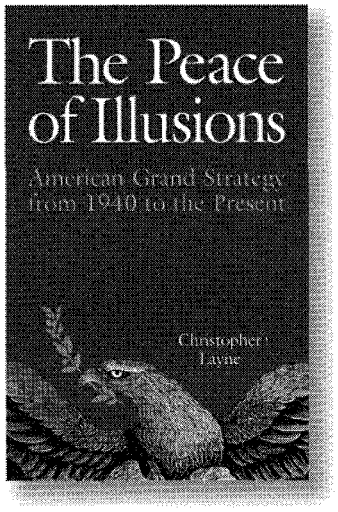

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precisely this reason that the disorders of the nervous system inspire wonder about the nature of thought, identity, and consciousness in a way that disorders of the gastrointestinal system, for example, generally do not.

By the surgeon's standard, Oliver Sacks—the author of *Awakenings*, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, and *An Anthropologist on Mars*, among other books—must rank as one of his generation's foremost neurologists. Indeed, it would be hard to name a more prolific or more eloquent admirer of neurological disease than Sacks, whose finely crafted essays about his patients and correspondents over the past four decades are like picture windows into the malfunctioning brain. The disorders he describes are not necessarily obscure, but Sacks has the ability to make even common ailments seem both personal and profound.

His latest book, *Musicophilia*, is a kaleidoscopic examination of the human response to music, and of the various ways in which that response can be altered by brain dysfunction. This is a topic that is obviously very close to the author's heart; Sacks has more than a passing appreciation of music, and he candidly tells us that the emotional resonance of music has at times assumed a crucial role in his own life. As a clinician, he first became aware of music's powerful effects in the late 1960's, when he observed that some patients frozen in a Parkinsonian state (the same patients he described in his memoir *Awakenings*) could be fleetingly reanimated by exposure to song and rhythm.

THE BOOK starts out with the premise that the propensity to create, perceive, and react to music is an innate component of human nature, no less a core characteristic of our species than is language. Moreover, Sacks maintains that our experience of music is woven integrally into the fabric of the nervous system, supported by complex and, presumably, specially dedicated motor, auditory, emotional, and mnemonic circuits.

When these circuits break down, we get a glimpse of their intricacy. Among the disorders that may result are various forms of "amusia"—the selective lack of musical perception, either from birth or as the result of brain injury. Sacks's chapter on amusia catalogs several types, each affecting a different aspect of musical experience. For instance, there are amusics who are completely insensitive to rhythm, pitch, and timbre, and who, like Vladimir Nabokov, experience music as "an arbitrary succession of more or less irritating sounds." Others—those with so-called amelodia—are perfectly capable of perceiving the individual elements of music, but are utterly unable to distinguish one tune from another. Amusia that strikes suddenly can be devastating, as Sacks illustrates in the poignant case of Rachael Y., a young performer whose musical abilities were shattered by head trauma.

Conversely, there are times when other parts of the brain fail but when the neural music box continues to play with remarkable fidelity. Patients who have lost the ability to speak can often still sing; indeed, in melodic-intonation therapy, the preservation of song is used as a stepping-stone in the recovery of language. Likewise, Sacks describes how Clive Wearing, a British musicologist with amnesia so profound that he cannot retain new information for more than a few seconds, is nevertheless able to conduct an orchestra as if he had no impairment at all. More remarkable still is the case of Gloria Lenhoff, a professional opera singer who has memorized arias in more than 30 languages. Gloria also happens to have a developmental disorder called Williams syndrome, and is by conventional measures profoundly mentally retarded.

In still other instances, the brain's propensity for music seems to run

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amok, hijacking other neural systems in ways that range from curious to disabling. Most of us have experienced what Sacks calls "brainworms," catchy tunes that get "stuck" in one's head, replaying themselves endlessly until they finally flicker out. A surprising number of people also have musical hallucinations; one of Sacks's young correspondents, Michael B., has been tormented by the incessant playing of an internal "radio" since the age of seven. Then there are musical synesthetes, for whom every note, key, or tune evokes a sensation in another modality—most often color, though at least one individual has been reported to have music-taste synesthesia for specific intervals, experiencing a minor second as sour but a major third as sweet.

For readers who have come to appreciate Oliver Sacks's characteristic combination of clinical insight, intellectual curiosity, and linguistic dexterity, *Musicophilia* does not disappoint. Tantalizing tales of exotic conditions like synesthesia and Williams syndrome are interspersed with discussions of more familiar—but, as Sacks shows, equally intriguing—phenomena like musical imagery, tone-deafness, and perfect pitch. Occasionally Sacks elaborates on the neuroanatomical correlates of music perception and its dysfunction, and he draws liberally from the scientific literature to illustrate the point that the varieties of musical experience are rooted, in the final analysis, in the activity of the brain.

Despite its subtitle, however, *Musicophilia* is not really a book about the brain; or at least it is not a book about brain science, any more than *Awakenings* was a book about movement disorders. Like Sacks's other works, *Musicophilia* deals more with the phenomenology of human experience than with theories about the underlying psychological and biological mechanisms

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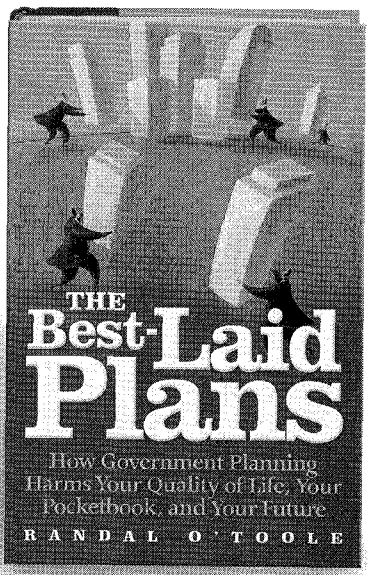

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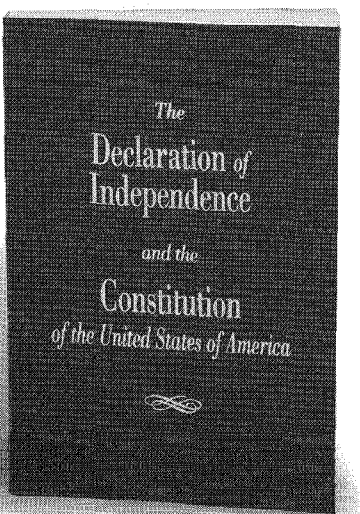

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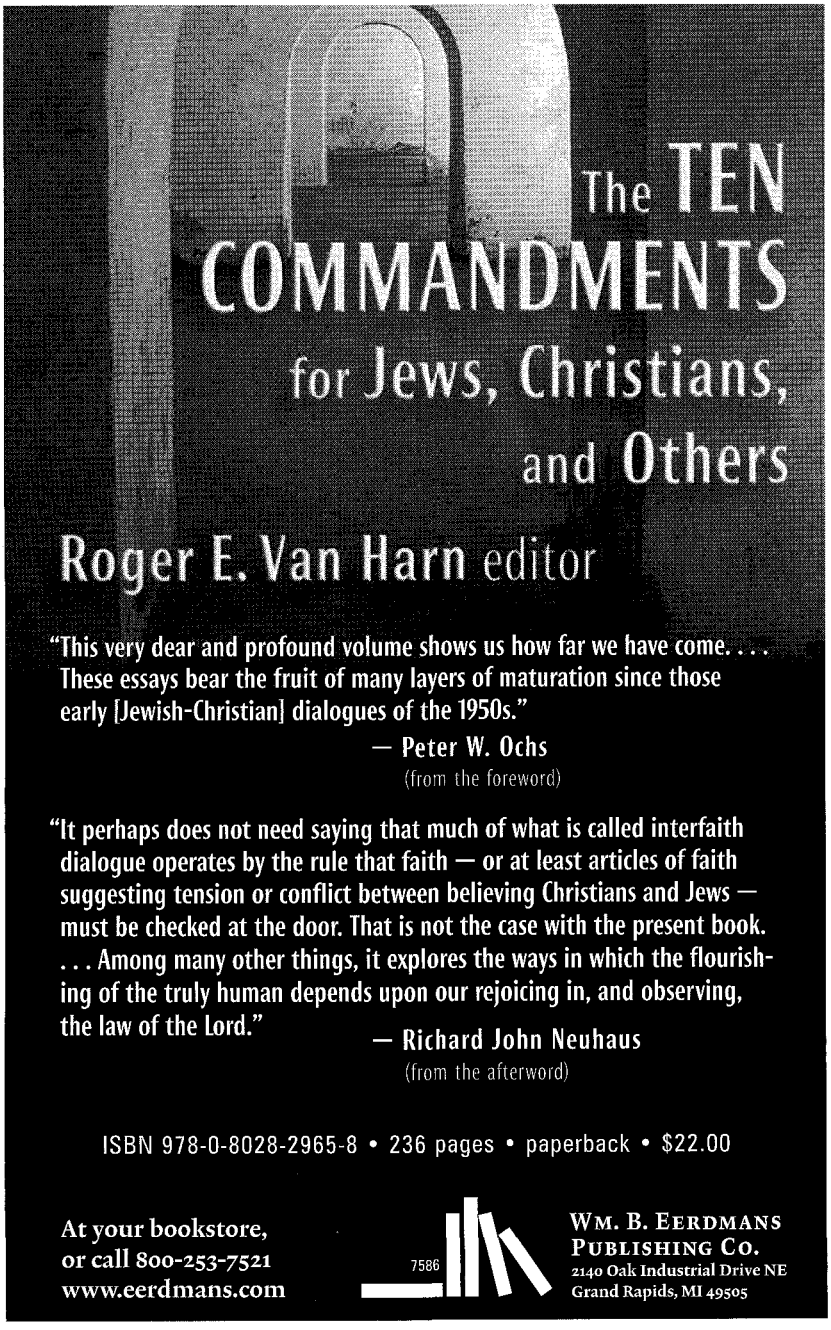
that shape this experience. A corollary is that Sacks tends to skirt the significant scientific debates about the relationship of music to the rest of cognition. Is musical perception "modular"—that is, a self-contained, dedicated neural system that is separate from the recognition of other sounds and patterns? Does music serve some specific adaptive function, or is it merely an enjoyable byproduct of more essential cognitive faculties, like language and motor learning? And if music is adaptive, what is it for?

Musicophilia hints at some of these questions, though without venturing close to any answers. This is reasonable, if one assumes that the book's aim is not so much to provide answers as to demonstrate human beings' deep biological affinity for music. Nevertheless, Sacks makes clear his sympathy for the view that music is a special adaptation, and that the human brain has evolved uniquely to accommodate it. This stance is problematic, however, and the evidence for it is much less substantial than Sacks seems prepared to acknowledge.

The main problem is that music seems to serve no particular function—an oddity first recognized in this context by Charles Darwin, who proposed in *The Descent of Man* that music must have been "acquired by the male and female progenitors of mankind for the sake of charming the opposite sex." The anthropologist Steven Mithen, whose book *The Singing Neanderthals* (2005) is cited approvingly by Sacks, provides a more up-to-date review of the possible benefits of music, including Darwin's suggestion as well as other hypotheses about the role of music in group cohesion, competition, and child care (in the form of lullabies).

None of these, unfortunately, is very convincing. Moreover, the evidence against music as an adaptive faculty is compelling: people who care little for music, perplexing as this may be to musicophiles, are at no obvious disadvantage in the affairs of life. If one compares the inability to appreciate music with the inability to use language, one can readily apprehend the deficiency in Sacks's pronouncement that "we humans are a musical species no less than a linguistic one."

The alternative view, as popularized by Steven Pinker in *How the Mind Works* (1997), is that music is a kind of "auditory cheesecake." On this hypothesis, music is a cultural invention that exploits the sensitivities of mental systems designed for other purposes, in much the same way that cheesecake provides a kind of gustatory pleasure that satisfies deep-seated cravings for nourishment but is not in itself essential to human survival. A similar if less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evocative comparison might be made with written language, which is clearly invented and not innate. Indeed, from the brain's perspective, written language behaves much like music: some people have difficulty acquiring it, some never acquire it, some lose it altogether, some excel at it, and some become obsessed with it.

But whether an adaptation or an invention, it remains a mystery why music is capable, for some people, of exerting such an intense effect on mood and behavior. How can a sequence of sounds lift a person out of depression, or calm tattered nerves? From what source does music derive its emotional strength?

"It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings," Sigmund Freud observed in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Freud was referring here to religious feelings, and in particular to the peculiar, ineffable, "oceanic" sensation that is the wellspring of religious belief. Or so, at any rate, it had been suggested to him: while the great psychiatrist admitted that he had no personal experience of such a sensation, he imagined it as a "feeling of indissoluble connection, of belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole."

Reading *Musicophilia*, one gets the sense that a similar feeling may lie at the root of music's power—even though this feeling, like religious conviction, may not be experienced by everyone to the same degree, and may not be experienced by some at all. (Interestingly, as Sacks notes, Freud was also indifferent to music.) Sacks's patient Mrs. N., for example, referred to one of her musical hallucinations as "the gates of heaven." In describing the power of music to "move" a crowd of listeners, both figuratively and literally, Sacks even goes so far as to speculate that "rhythm binds together the individual nervous systems of a human community."

Of course, this kind of speculation brings us little closer to understanding why music has the effects it does, or what it is in the brain that corresponds to the experience of music. Sacks's slightly incongruous use of the term "nervous systems" reminds us how far away we are from understanding the biological substrates of consciousness. From a scientific point of view, his statement would have been no less informative if, for "nervous systems," he had substituted "hearts," "souls," or "egos."

The tales in *Musicophilia* may justly impress us with the brain's complexity—as well as its fragility—but more than that, they illuminate the richness of human thought and emotion, compared to which our empirical understanding still seems somewhat meager. It may be fortunate, in this regard, that *Musicophilia* is *not* a book about science.

Book Sense

How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now

by James L. Kugel

Free Press. 848 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Abraham Socher

James Kugel has had an interesting career. In the early 1970's, he served as poetry editor for *Harper's* magazine while pursuing graduate work in the historical-critical study of the Bible. He went on to teach the latter subject for many years at Harvard before moving full-time to Israel, where he now directs the Institute for the History of the Hebrew Bible at Bar Ilan University. He is also an Orthodox Jew—and for a professional Bible scholar, as he frankly admits at the outset of his massive, massively erudite, and very entertaining new book, this is a problem.

Kugel's first major work was *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (1981), but he really made his mark with *The Bible as It Was* (1997), a brilliant and sympathetic account of the interpretive techniques of such ancient readers of the Bible as Philo, Josephus, the rabbis of the Talmud, the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the authors of the New Testament, and dozens of others.* All of them, Kugel argued, shared a basic approach. They did not passively read the biblical text; instead, they rewrote it, filling in its narrative gaps with fanciful backstories and subplots, and treating difficult phrases as jumping-off points for leaps of moral sermonizing, theological fancy, and legal innovation. In the Jewish tradition, the results of this interpretive exercise became part of the "Oral Torah," supplementing the "Written Torah" of Scripture. In Christianity, a similar exercise forged the connections between the "Old" and New Testaments.

This much has been known, more or less, for a long time. For the English reader, many of the ancient Jewish stories and elaborations were collected and retold in the early 20th century by the scholar Louis Ginzberg, whose multi-volume *Legends of the Jews* is still in print. But whereas Ginzberg implied that these were simply a species of folklore, Kugel recovered the underlying principles of creative close reading (*midrash*) that gave rise to even some of the more extravagant of the ancient interpretations.

Here is an example, adduced by Kugel in *The Bible as It Was*. When God commissions Moses at the burning bush to return to Egypt and demand the release of the Hebrew slaves, Moses famously resists.

Abraham Socher, *a new contributor, is associate professor of religion and director of Jewish Studies at Oberlin College.*

* See the review by Hillel Halkin in the April 1998 Commentary.

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"I am," he protests at one point, "a man of uncircumcised lips"—an odd phrase, which seems to suggest a speech impediment. The Bible declines to tell us what exactly was wrong with Moses' lips or, indeed, much about his early life at all. But Jewish readers who went to Sunday school know the midrashic backstory, which also found its way into Christian sources and became a motif in Western art.

As an infant prince in the court of Pharaoh, it seems, Moses once grabbed Pharaoh's crown. (In the version preferred by painters like Poussin and Tempestini, he then trampled on it.) This seemed like a bad omen to the court advisers; they devised a test, placing before him a platter containing a piece of gold and a burning coal. If he chose the gold, then the incident with the crown was a dangerous portent of royal ambition. If he chose the burning coal, then he was just a baby attracted to bright objects. Moses reached for the gold, but at the last moment the angel Gabriel, unseen, pushed his hand toward the coal. He seized it and, in bewildered pain, brought it to his mouth.

Is this a fairy tale, or an interpretation? In an ingenious feat of scholarly reverse engineering, Kugel showed how this and hundreds of other, similar midrashim were composed. The ancient interpreters proceeded on the assumption that the Bible's words always carried the maximum freight of meaning. They also held that the collection of books making up the Bible was a harmonious and self-glossing whole, which hinted at incidents and teachings that it did not spell out. So if you wanted to understand what Moses might have meant in objecting that he was a man of "uncircumcised lips," you had to search through the Bible for the same or similar expressions.

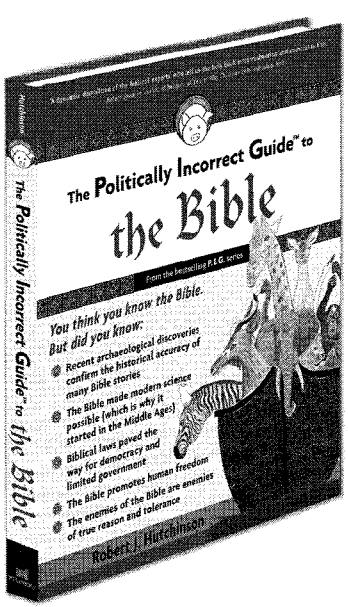
Such an interpreter would quickly hit upon the prophet Isaiah's terrifying commission in the Temple. There he sees God Himself and His angelic attendants. Isaiah cries out in words reminiscent of Moses: "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips," whereupon an angel flies to him with a live coal, taken from the altar, and touches it to his lips, purifying him. Furnished with the image of the angel touching a coal to the prophet's lips from this linked (one might almost say hyperlinked) biblical passage, the ancient interpreters then proceeded to tell a story about Moses' childhood accident in the Pharaoh's court.

IN THE undergraduate course he taught at Harvard, Kugel liked to counterpose such creative ancient interpretations (the Bible as it was) to the disenchanted spadework of modern biblical studies (the Bible as it is, in itself, to critical scholars). When enrollment in this course outpaced even Harvard's introductory course in economics, thereby becoming the most popular on campus, the undergraduate *Crimson* ran the news under the headline, "God Beats Mammon."

How to Read the Bible grew out of this course, and in many ways it fits the genre of college-survey-become-bestseller. Over the course of 36 chapters, Kugel covers all of the major books and incidents of the Hebrew Bible and many of the minor ones, tacking back and forth between the interpretations of the ancients and the moderns. The attractively produced book is so breezily written, with forbidding scholarship tucked away in closely packed endnotes, that one can still hear the seemingly spontaneous, occasionally corny lecture-hall asides.

Yet something more serious than a conventional survey is going on here. On the dedication page, Kugel quotes but leaves untranslated an Aramaic passage from the *Zohar*,

Where Would Western Civilization Be Without the Bible?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the medieval classic of Jewish mysticism. It reads:

> Rabbi Simeon sat and cried. He said: If I reveal and if I don't reveal. He opened and said, "it is time to act for God, they are nullifying His Torah." Why is it time to act for God? Because they are nullifying His Torah.

Why the tears? Rabbi Simeon's fear was that the divine secrets of the Torah were being revealed and distorted by those who were unworthy of them. Kugel's problem is more or less the opposite. Biblical scholarship over the last three centuries has argued that the Bible can be explained as a set of entirely human documents, a position codified by the German scholar Julius Wellhausen at the end of the 19th century. In his "documentary hypothesis," Wellhausen proposed that the Five Books of Moses had been written by four distinct authors (designated J, E, P, and D), none of whom was Moses. For his part, although he duly notes that the details of Wellhausen's theory have been refined and his evolutionary scheme—which posited a straight line of development from one biblical source to the next—has been scrapped, Kugel accepts the basic framework. Hence, for this Orthodox Jew, the tears.

Again and again in *How to Read the Bible*, Kugel relays the bad news, for traditional believers, that has been brought to us by modern philological and archaeological excavations. The stories of Abraham do not cohere. Moses' rescue from the bulrushes is borrowed from a much earlier story of someone named Sargon I of Agade. The exodus may have happened, but not on a biblical scale. The Psalms of David are not only not by David, they are not the cries of an individual to his Maker but rather "cultic pieces penned by anonymous temple functionaries, studded with conventional phrases and themes and worded in a one-size-fits-all vocabulary . . . designed . . . for multiple

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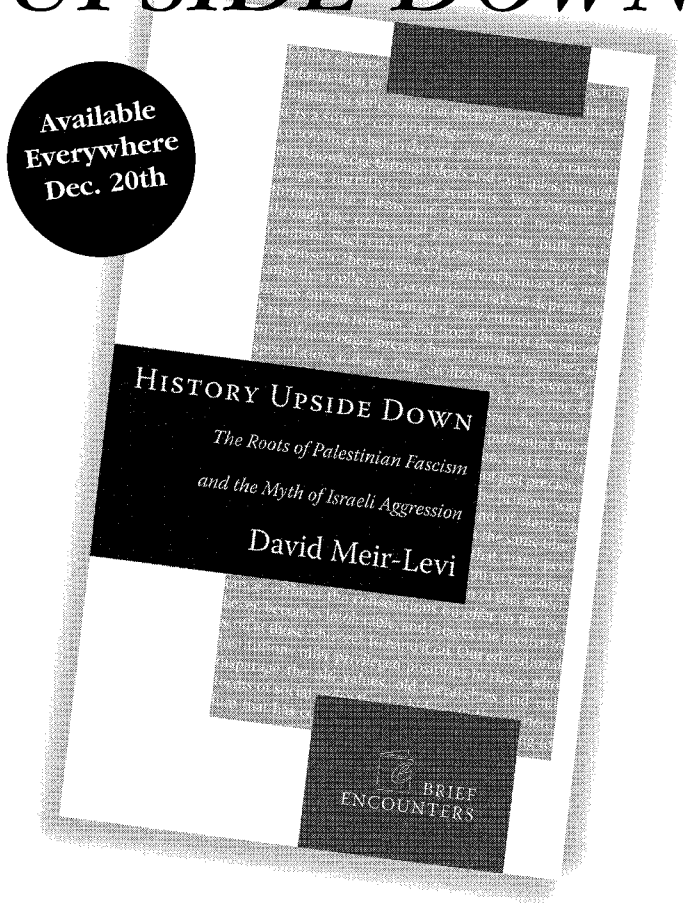
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re-use." And, just to round things out, the God of the Bible is not always the God of monotheism, which is precisely why He is so concerned about other gods.

BUT WHAT about the underlying *ideas* of the Bible? Here Kugel's treatment is less than satisfying.

One example will have to suffice. In 1872, the English Assyriologist George Smith translated the cuneiform Epic of Gilgamesh, which contains a strikingly similar but apparently much older rendition of the biblical flood. About the consternation this caused in Western theological circles, both Christian and Jewish, and the efforts to deal with it, Kugel writes:

> A distinctly apologetic tone crept into theologians' reckoning. . . . "Our" flood story has a tone and message quite different from that of the various Mesopotamian versions. In the Bible, the flood comes as a result of human sinfulness (and not, as in Gilgamesh, because of human overpopulation and excess noisiness); Noah survives because he is virtuous. . . . God rewards him with continued life but not with immortality. . . . [T]he story ends in a . . . covenant between God and Noah's family, a characteristically biblical idea.

"All this is true," Kugel grants. But even so, it does not "quite put to rest the uneasiness created by the similarities." The real difference between the Bible and the Epic of Gilgamesh, he insists, is not in the stories themselves but entirely in the way the Bible was subsequently transmitted and interpreted—not in the "content" but in the "context."

This, of course, is in line with Kugel's approach in his earlier book. Here, he recapitulates it in the form of a piece of advice to potentially troubled readers: "keep your eyes on the ancient interpreters." And he reasserts it as a kind of credo in a final chapter entitled "After Such Knowledge":

> What Scripture means is not what today's ingenious scholars can discover about its original meaning (and certainly not about the events and persons it describes), but what the ancient interpreters always held it to mean.

Kugel is making two points, one historical and the other theological. The first is that what we call the Bible was actually *created* by the ancient interpreters: thus, what makes Exodus and Isaiah part of the same "book" is the assumption that each must be understood in light of the other. The second is that the approach of the ancient interpreters to the text of the Bible—as a work divinely inspired and, fundamentally, meant to teach us how to live—is the right one.

There is, clearly, much to be said for these two claims. But is that all there is to say? Was there really nothing deep and distinctive about the biblical ideas of sin, righteousness, covenant, and so forth, *before* the ancient interpreters ever got hold of them?

A famous talmudic dictum states that "no verse can be deprived of its plain sense (*p'shat*)." Part of the charm and daring of rabbinic exegesis turns on the often startling contrast between the plain sense of the narrative, or of the law, and its proffered interpretation. But it is precisely at the level of that plain sense—the powerful images and theological ideas on the *surface* of the text—where Kugel seems to me least compelling.

For him there are really only two ways to read the Bible: either to get under it via critical scholarship, or to go beyond it via midrash. Yet each entails a significant loss, and the second almost as much as the

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first. For one characteristic of midrash is that, considered as narrative, it is often measurably flatter and less resonant than the biblical text it supplements. The ancient rabbis were themselves conscious of this weakness, which is one reason they insisted upon the integrity of the Bible's plain sense and (unlike early Christians) never claimed to be producing new Scripture.

Take, for instance, the midrash about Moses. Whatever its charms, no sensitive reader would imagine that it was part of the Bible. Where the Bible, here as elsewhere, is evocatively spare, mysterious, and unpredictable, midrash is often schematic, apologetic, and predictable. Sometimes midrashic interpretations will highlight or develop a thematic motif or theological idea of the Bible, but just as often they will ignore, obscure, or deny it. Indeed, something of the sort may be happening in this very midrash. Where the texts in Exodus and Isaiah may be trying to express something profound about the difficulty, even impossibility, of giving human voice to divine speech, the ancient interpreters focus, however charmingly, on the medical issues.

Needless to say, Kugel knows that one can read the Bible as literature and as theology, but he himself is evidently too wary of the dangers of anachronism to do so. The desire to see the Bible as "great literature" is, he says, "apologetics-lite." In his own case, there may also be another reason for resisting an aesthetic approach to the Bible: religiously speaking, it simply does not satisfy. In this connection, Kugel quotes another famous passage from the *Zohar*:

> Rabbi Simeon said: Woe to him who regards the Torah as a book of mere tales and profane matters. If this were so, we ourselves might write a Torah nowadays . . . even more excellent.

As the midrash itself proves,

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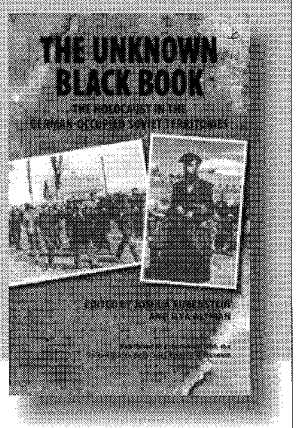

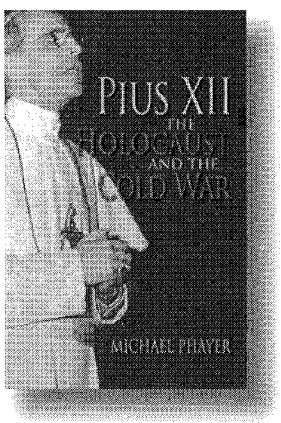

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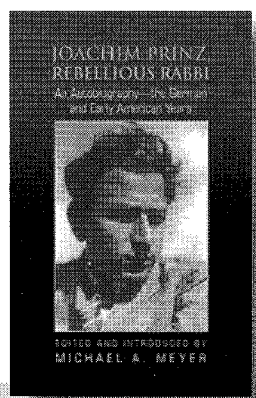

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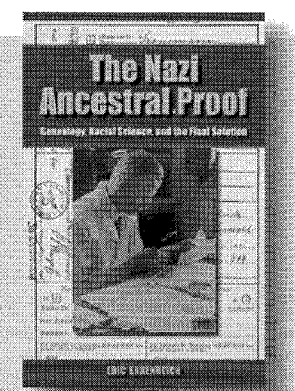

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however, re-writing (let alone writing) Scripture is easier said than done. The Bible's intrinsic literary and theological power, I would contend, is very much part of its plain sense, and the reader deprives himself of this at his peril.

Kugel has written a wonderful book, one that lays bare the worlds both of modern biblical scholarship and of ancient biblical interpretation with wit and erudition. It is small criticism to note that these two ways of reading the Bible do not exhaust its meanings.

A Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy

The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism

by Naomi Klein

Metropolitan. 558 pages. $28.00

Reviewed by
Jonathan Kay

JUST A MONTH before Naomi Klein published *No Logo* in January 2000, the anti-globalization movement held its giant coming-out fracas at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle. Her timing was perfect. The book quickly became the movement's unofficial bible, as well as an introductory text for every professor and journalist looking to understand the "root causes" of this violent new phenomenon. Over the last seven years, the young Canadian author has become the Noam Chomsky of her generation. A poll conducted in 2005 by England's *Prospect* magazine put her at number eleven on the list of top "global intellectuals."

But like other anti-globalization activists, Klein faced a quandary after the attacks of 9/11. How was she to square her convictions with the demonstrated reality that Islamofascism is a greater threat to our well-being than, say, McDonald's or Wal-Mart? In her new book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Klein finesses this question in an original and ambitious way.

The war on terror, she argues, is not what it seems. Far from being a life-and-death battle between Western democracies and Islamic jihadists, it is in fact a stage-managed diversionary campaign, fought on behalf of corporate profiteers. Its goal is to create a crisis atmosphere in which the U.S. and its international lackeys can impose their favored economic policies. Indeed, as Klein sees it, this "shock doctrine" is the brutal reality behind a range of seemingly unrelated recent cataclysms, events that have allowed capitalist elites to "plunge in their hands and begin remaking the world."

IN KLEIN'S telling, the event that tipped the world into the hands of corporate oligarchs—the original sin to which she repeatedly returns—was the CIA-abetted overthrow of left-wing Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973. In the upheaval that followed the coup staged by General Augusto Pinochet, the University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman convinced the new strongman to privatize state companies, deregulate the financial sector, tear down protectionist barriers, and eliminate price controls.

Friedman is Klein's arch-villain. His policies in Chile, she argues, established the economic template that has guided global history to this day. Whenever working people have risen up to create an authentic socialist society, the unholy trinity of the U.S. government, Western business interests, and Friedmanite academics conspired to exploit or create a destabilizing crisis and thus to bring the commanding heights of the economy under corporate control.

The bulk of *The Shock Doctrine* is taken up with revisionist explanations of how the great events of our era fit this model. In the case of Poland, for instance, Klein disputes the idea that Lech Walesa's Solidarity movement and its rank-and-file supporters were hostile to Communist ideals. True, they wanted to break the government's control of Poland's debt-ridden economy. But their goal, she insists, was not to privatize state assets—it was to pursue a more authentic vision of socialism by putting the means of production into the hands of democratic workers' cooperatives.

Before Solidarity could act, however, the free-market ideologues of the IMF and the U.S. Treasury moved in. "An economic meltdown and a heavy debt load, compounded by the disorientation of rapid regime change," Klein writes, "meant that Poland was in the perfect weakened position to accept a radical shock-therapy program." So too in post-Soviet Russia, where, she believes, citizens wanted the government to continue guaranteeing full employment and to devolve the assets of the Communist state to local workers.

Klein relates the story of South Africa's transition to majority rule in nearly identical terms. Nelson Mandela, she reports, was dedicated to the "Freedom Charter," a socialist blueprint that envisaged the nationalization of mines, banks, and utilities, and which promised the creation of an egalitarian workers' utopia. But during the chaotic transition period, F.W. de Klerk and other white leaders ensured that the new black government would be beholden to multilateral entities like the IMF and GATT, which in turn coaxed the new South Africa to adopt free-market policies. "They never freed us," a long-time anti-apartheid activist told Klein. "They only took the chain from around our neck and put it on our ankles."

In post-Katrina New Orleans, Klein charges that right-wing oper-

JONATHAN KAY *is managing editor for comment at Canada's* National Post.

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atives exploited the devastation to open charter schools, replace public housing with condominiums, and evade government regulation. In Sri Lanka, the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami allowed the government to clear coastal regions of traditional, self-reliant fishing communities in favor of high-end tourist resorts—a process tantamount, one local activist told her, to "a second tsunami of corporate globalization."

As Klein sees it, public opinion in most societies naturally supports "social justice," the empowerment of workers, and a heavy state role in the economy. The function of "disaster capitalism" is to undermine this tendency by scaring, distracting, or otherwise neutralizing ordinary people. Were it not for this "corporatist crusade," Klein believes, advanced economies would have evolved to include the sort of local worker collectives once championed by leaders like Lech Walesa and Nelson Mandela.

Only a few such small-scale cooperatives now exist, Klein concedes, but the idealists who run them are pointing the way to a better future, one that steers between the "fundamentalisms" of Communism and capitalism. These men and women, she writes, are "taking what's there and fixing it, reinforcing it, making it better and more equal. Most of all, they are building in resilience—for when the next shock hits."

THERE CAN BE no doubt that Naomi Klein is a hard-working writer. Unlike some contemporary pamphleteers, she does not pump out screeds from a laptop at Starbucks. From South Africa and Iraq to Sri Lanka and New Orleans, she has actually done legwork in the places she writes about.

What this demonstrates, however, is that all the fact-finding in the world is of no help to an observer whose view of events is systematically warped by ideology. Again and again in *The Shock Doctrine*, Klein reverts to the ridiculous idea that modern economies can be organized around networks of small worker collectives overseen by activist governments. Indeed, she is so enamored of this dream that she sees its almost universal failure as the prime evidence for a grand, diabolical plot led by Milton Friedman and his henchmen on Wall Street and at the IMF and WTO. It does not occur to her that the world has rejected socialism because, in the end, it was a bad idea.

As a result, *The Shock Doctrine* reads like an elaborate conspiracy theory, with Klein making her case largely by stitching together grandiose generalizations, incriminating factoids, and supporting quotations that she has gleaned from interviews with like-minded activists. Consider, for example, her treatment of Iraq, a country that has been "auctioned off" in the aftermath of Saddam's fall. In one passage, she seizes on the offhand remarks of a few U.S. officials to argue that they allowed widespread looting in April 2003 because they sought "to radically downsize the [Iraqi] state and privatize its assets." More ludicrously, she suggests that Iraq's elections in late 2003 were canceled not because of the country's unsettled political and security situation but because "Green Zone corporatists" were worried about an obscure poll suggesting that Iraqis might vote for parties promising to create "more government jobs."

Where China is concerned, Klein's analysis is no less bizarre. The Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, she argues, was not really a confrontation between the country's Communist establishment and reform-minded students. Rather, it was an anti-globalization protest, pitting young Chinese socialists against Beijing's plans to implement "unregulated capitalism" and turn the country into "a sprawling export zone." Her proof? An interview with a single oddball veteran of the protests, plus the incriminating fact that Deng Xiaoping once invited Milton Friedman to lecture Chinese civil servants about capitalism.

Perhaps the most outrageous section of Klein's book deals with Israel, where, she alleges, "the rapid expansion of the high-tech security economy [has] created a powerful appetite inside [the country's] wealthy and most powerful sectors for abandoning peace in favor of fighting a continual, and continuously expanding, war on terror." She backs up this theory by noting that the value of Israel's annual exports of counterterrorism-related products has risen to $1.2 billion. What she does not disclose is that the total value of Israel's annual exports is more than $40 billion, within a gross domestic product of some $200 billion. The notion that Israel has an economic interest in continued suicide bombings and rocket attacks is nothing short of lunatic.

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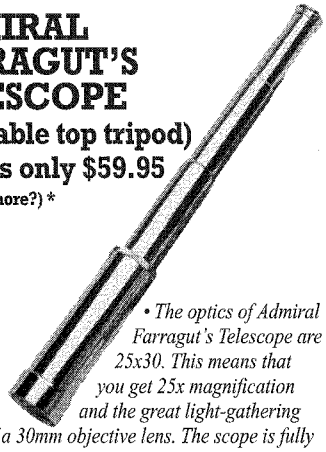

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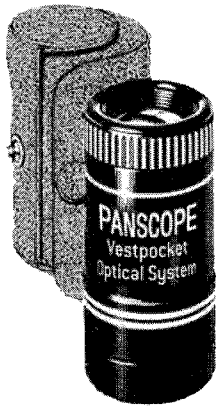

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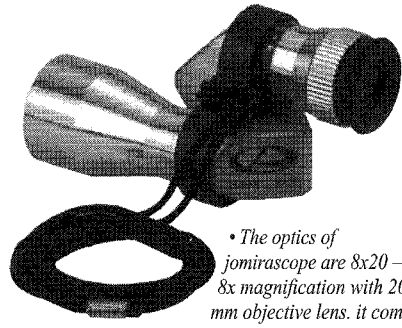

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WILL ANY OF this prevent *The Shock Doctrine* from repeating the success of *No Logo*? Probably not. The book plays powerfully to the idea that globalization has failed the world's poor, a claim that, despite the economic booms under way in China, India, and other parts of the developing world, is now the received wisdom among many Western intellectuals. Even Joseph Stiglitz, a one-time World Bank chief economist who has become a strident critic of free-market economics and globalization, felt compelled, in a review for the *New York Times*, to offer some words of praise for Klein's rantings.

The Shock Doctrine will be popular with the many leftists who, like Klein herself, believe that a mysterious right-wing cabal runs the world and is responsible for all its evils. A one-size-fits-all explanation is certainly a great comfort, making for ready answers to every question and sparing those who espouse it from having to sort out the complex reality of the world we actually inhabit. The pity is that the audience for such pathetic and insidious stuff has become, or remains, so large.

Rain of Terror

The First Day of the Blitz: September 7, 1940
by Peter Stansky
Yale. 224 pp. $24.00

Reviewed by
Gabriel Schoenfeld

HOW WELL do democracies bear up under the strain of terror? The question has been posed time and again. England, Spain, Germany, Italy, Greece, and of course Israel are but some of the countries that have been plagued by bouts of terrorist violence, some of them prolonged. The United States was tested severely on September 11, 2001.

A very different kind of extreme case is a starting point for some suggestive comparisons. Beginning on September 7, 1940, Great Britain's capital was pounded by Germany's Luftwaffe for 57 consecutive nights. After that initial phase, with somewhat decreasing intensity punctuated by a few enormously destructive raids, London and other British industrial and port cities were bombed without interruption until May 11, 1941. On that final night, after nine months of trying to bring the country to its knees, the Germans unleashed their most lethal raid, killing nearly 1,500 Londoners. Altogether, the death toll in London from the Blitz was 40,000.

How did Londoners hold up? That is the question Peter Stansky takes up in *The First Day of the Blitz*. Stansky, a historian at Stanford who has written widely on British social history, makes evident that there are really two subjects here. The first is the historical reality of how Londoners suffered and coped. The second is "the myth of the Blitz," which has been handed down to us as a picture of the English people drawing together, going about the tasks of rescue and reconstruction, all the while stoically sipping tea amid the fires and the rubble. Is that picture valid or not?

THE NUMEROUS diaries and other sources that Stansky has combed to re-create the horrors of wartime London, concentrating on the impact of the very first German attack, are as indelible as our own tales of September 11. As one air warden recorded, September 7, 1940 was "one of the few war dates fixed in our minds forever. And not the date only, but one hour of it: about five o'clock on that September Saturday."

It was at that moment that a kind of hell descended from the skies. The bombs ignited the largest conflagration in London's history, surpassing even the Great Fire of September 1666. One woman, writing down what she had witnessed from inside a shelter in a school building where, along with a great many children, she had taken refuge on that first night, would later recall the scene:

> Sticks of bombs whistled down, and the air was literally torn apart in a loud rushing noise as they sped earthward. Everybody instinctively crouched. Holding my breath in an agony of suspense, I waited for the blast fully expecting to be blown to pieces. The bombs exploded, rocking the great building to its foundations, but by some miracle the school escaped unscathed and nobody was hurt. But the awful expectancy had been too much, and I sensed a rising panic as the overwrought women burst into tears and the little ones sensing their fear began to scream.

The sense of panic would not last. As the rain of fire continued for days, then weeks, then months, Londoners—or at least those who chose not to be evacuated—became remarkably inured. With the passage of time, the horror stories became a commonplace and then began to lose all interest. "Bomb bores," as those who insisted on telling their tales of near death were called, came to be a peril of their own, especially notorious in train compartments.

Alongside this demonstration of the human capacity for adaptation, the terror also elicited a great deal of cooperation and heroism. Volunteer air wardens and shelter marshals carried out a range of onerous responsibilities, from preparing the public for expected poison-gas attacks to gathering corpses for pick-up by roving vans dispatched from the city morgue. Firefighters played a crucial role; exposed to both the flames and the falling bombs, many

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD, *the senior editor of* COMMENTARY, *runs and writes daily for* Connecting . . . the Dots *at commentarymagazine.com/ctd.*

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Myths About Israel and the Middle East (2)

Should we re-examine endlessly repeated clichés?

In a previous installment in this series of clarifying messages about Israel and the Middle East, we examined certain myths which, by dint of constant repetition, had acquired currency and acceptance. We looked at the myth of "Palestinian nationhood," the myth of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") being "occupied territory," the myth that Jewish settlements in these territories are "the greatest obstacle to peace," and the myth that Israel is unwilling to "yield land for peace." And we cleared up the greatest myth of all, namely that Israel's administration of the territories, and not the unrelenting hatred of the Arabs against the Jews, is the root cause of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel. But those are not all the myths; there are more.

What are more of these myths?

■ **Myth:** The Arabs of Israel are a persecuted minority.
Reality: The over one million non-Jews (mostly Arabs) who are citizens of Israel have the same civil rights that Jews have. They vote, are members of the Knesset (parliament), and are part of Israel's civil and diplomatic service, just as their Jewish fellow citizens. Arabs have complete religious freedom and full access to the Israeli legal, health and educational systems – including Arabic and Muslim universities. The only difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews is that Jewish young men must serve three years in the military and at least one month a year until age 50. Young Jewish women serve for two years. The Arabs have no such civic obligation. For them, military service is voluntary. Not too surprisingly, except for the Druze, very few avail themselves of the privilege.

■ **Myth:** Having (ill-advisedly) already given up control of the Gaza Strip, Israel should also give up the administration of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") because strategic depth is meaningless in this age of missiles.
Reality: Israel is a mini-state – about half the size of San Bernardino county in California. If another, even smaller mini-state were carved out of it, Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the professional opinion of 100 retired U.S. generals and admirals. If the Arabs were to occupy whatever little strategic depth Israel has between the Jordan River and its populated coast, they would not need any missiles. Artillery and mortars would suffice, since Israel would be only nine miles wide at its waist. Those who urge such a course either do not understand the situation or have a death wish for Israel.

■ **Myth:** If Israel would allow a Palestinian state to arise in Judea and Samaria it would be a democratic state and would be totally demilitarized.
Reality: There is no prospect at all that anything resembling a democratic state could be created in the territories. There is not a single democratic Arab state – all of them are tyrannies of varying degrees. Even today, under partial Israeli administration, Hamas and other factions fight for supremacy and ruthlessly murder each other. Another Lebanon, with its incessant civil wars, is much more likely. The lawlessness and chaos that prevail in Gaza since Israel's withdrawal is a good prospect of what would happen if Israel – foolishly and under the pressure of "world opinion" – were to abandon this territory. As for demilitarization, that is totally unlikely. Because – with Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, most of which are in a declared state of war with Israel, at its borders – an irresistible power vacuum would be created. Despite pious promises, the arms merchants of the world would find a great new market and the neighboring hostile Arab countries would be happy to supply anything else that might be needed.

> "It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern our policy."

■ **Myth:** Israel should make "confidence-building gestures" for the sake of peace.
Reality: What really is it that the world expects Israel to do for the sake of peace? Most of the 22 Arab countries consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and don't even recognize its "existence." That has been going on for almost sixty years. Isn't it about time that the Arabs made some kind of a "gesture?" Could they not for instance terminate the constant state of war? Could they not stop launching rockets into Israel from areas that Israel has abandoned for the sake of peace? Could they not stop the suicide bombings, which have killed hundreds of Israelis and which have made extreme security measures – such as the defensive fence and convoluted bypass – roads necessary? Any of these would create a climate of peace and would indeed be the "confidence-building gestures" that the world hopes for.

Countless "peace conferences" to settle this festering conflict have taken place. All have ended in failure because of the intransigence of the Arabs. President Clinton, toward the end of his presidency, convened a conference with the late unlamented Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, the prime minister of Israel at that time. Mr. Barak offered virtually everything that Arafat had requested, except the partition of Jerusalem and the acceptance of the so-called refugees, their descendants having swollen from the 650,000 who fled the nascent state of Israel during the War of Liberation, to an incredible 5 million. Arafat left in a huff and started his infamous intifada instead, a bloody war that has cost thousands of Palestinian and Israeli lives. Israel is America's staunchest ally and certainly its only true friend in that area of the world. It is in our national interest that reality, not myths, govern our policy.

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of them perished. And at all levels of society, notes Stansky, there was "a great emphasis on not showing fear, on rising above the situation, on conforming, one might say to the stereotype of the British character of the 'stiff upper lip.'"

IN ALL these respects, then, the myth of the Blitz is not a myth at all. But that is hardly the end of the story. In the opening phase of the German aerial assault, fear of social collapse, of the kind predicted by H.G. Wells in *The War in the Air* (1908) and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), was widespread. Some of it was justified. For the flip side of social solidarity was social disintegration. From the outset, the authorities were alarmed about the staying power of the populace in the face of the German air assault, which was assumed to be a prelude designed to soften up England for a naval and paratroop invasion.

The Ministry of Information, on a war footing since September 3, 1939, prepared daily "house intelligence reports," which included a section on morale. Four days into the Blitz, according to the report, morale was "rather more strained than the newspapers suggest." Unspecified material and psychological factors were noted as the cause. Rumors, similarly unspecified, were said to be stoking fears, and at the center of some of them were the city's Jews.

Thus, one daily report took note of a groundswell of anti-Semitism, arising "not so much on account of a marked difference in conduct between Jews and Cockneys, but because the latter, seeking a scapegoat as an outlet for emotional disturbances, pick on the traditional and nearest one." Another report took a different tack entirely:

> Owing to the behavior of the Jews, particularly in the East End, where they are said to show too great a keenness to save their own skins and too little consideration for other people, there are signs of anti-Semitic trouble.

Such friction was hardly the only problem. There was a great deal of looting, and black markets in stolen goods soon emerged. "People were like vultures," wrote a police officer, "going into bombed-out houses and shops, and they'd even take rings and valuables off dead bodies." It was estimated that some 42 percent of the looters were air-raid wardens and firemen who had ready access to bombed-out sites. In September alone, hundreds of cases of looting came before the courts. In successive months, the number rose into the thousands.

In a few respects, then, the myth of the Blitz is indeed a myth.

WHAT DOES this story mean for us? At various junctures, Stansky adverts to 9/11, noting that the Blitz "has often been cited as an example of how citizens can withstand attack, draw together, and perform heroic actions"; "certainly," he adds, "this was the case in New York City on September 11, 2001." But he never develops this theme, instead resorting to such banalities as the assertion that both September 7, 1940 and September 11, 2001 "had much to say about death, destruction, and our survival as human beings."

In truth, the differences between the dramatic events of the past and those of our own time are numerous and too apparent to list. But if the images of the two eras cannot be readily matched, the strains that beset Britain during the Blitz may perhaps be usefully compared with the strains that beset us now.

Overall, of course, we are in a far better position than the British. Unlike them, we are stronger than our adversaries. But in some areas we have been behaving worse. It is not that we suffered from looting and social disorder either on September 11 or in its aftermath; not at all. Nor, despite the efforts of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, has a new strain of anti-Semitism, tied directly to the wars precipitated by 9/11 become visible among the American people.

Our real problem is that we are deeply disunited about how best to confront those who would destroy us. The causes of that disunity can be debated, but the fact of it is something that few would have predicted in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Nor is it in the least clear where this division is going to lead us. Unlike the British, and unlike Americans themselves in World War II, many of us seem convinced that victory over our adversaries is an impossibility, or that we have only ourselves to blame for their aggression against us. The consequences of this attitude, should it continue to gain traction, cannot be specified, but can be all too clearly foreseen.

Such, at any rate, are some of the troubling thoughts provoked by Peter Stansky's absorbing book.

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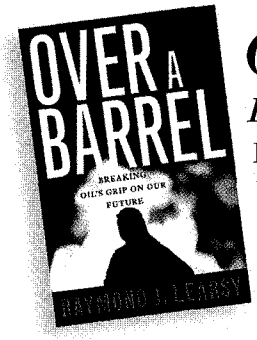

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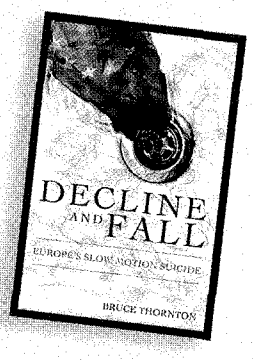

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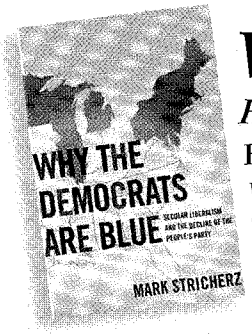

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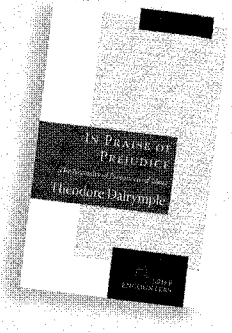

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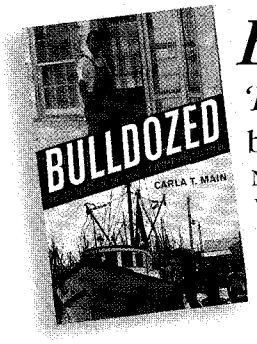

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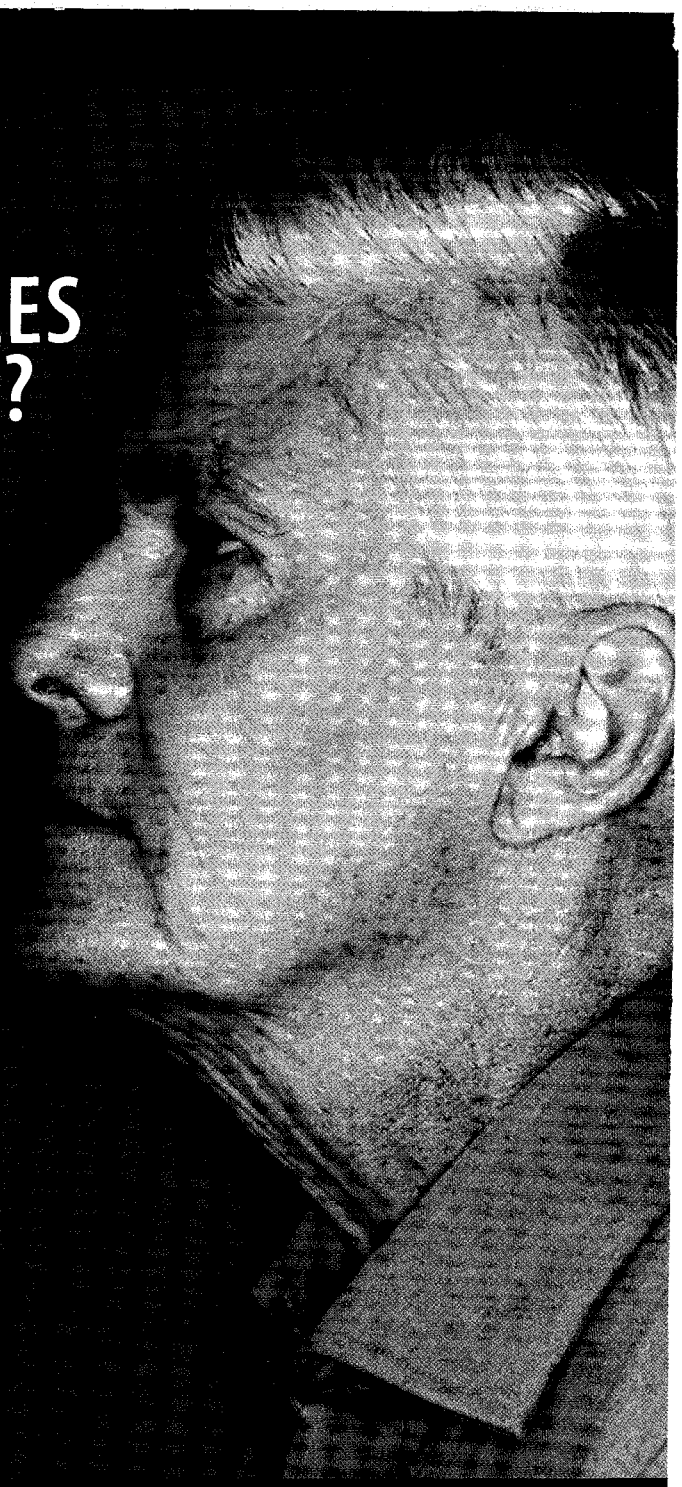

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